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THE UNIVERSITY
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**Sky Seen through Trees:
Rethinking Narrative Coherence in
Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Ying Liu

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degree of Doctor of Psychotherapy and Counselling

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

This thesis critiques the concept of narrative coherence through an in-depth inquiry into the lived experience of narrative incoherence in counselling and psychotherapy. It questions whether lived experience necessarily requires narrative structure and the extent to which a coherent narrative is essential for psychological and emotional well-being. It thus attempts to depathologise the experience of narrative incoherence, instead honouring those moments in therapy when words quite literally fail us.

Adopting writing as inquiry as its methodological foundation, the thesis continuously moves between experiential self-searching and intellectual engagement with theoretical insights. I draw particularly on conceptual resources offered by Butler, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Winnicott, Freud, Leader and the theory of the dialogical self. I write into my personal experiences as a client in therapy and as a therapist and this analytical work is complemented by reflections on my experience of a short-term sandplay process, undertaken specifically for this research project, which aimed to surface the interstices of language and the non-verbal therapeutic process.

Parallel to its questioning of the demand for narrative coherence is this thesis's challenge to the linear, well-structured and well-articulated scholarly voice of traditional doctoral thesis work. Methodologically and stylistically, this thesis stays close to that which is inarticulate and unstructured, which is often termed incoherence. Instead of presenting a planned linear process, I argue that the research process of this thesis is an unforeseeable and unpredictable journey into the unknown in which I encounter rather than choose the conceptual resources I use.

This thesis concludes with three main points, namely 'letting go', 'holding on' and 'to play'. I encourage therapists to let go of the obsession with and demand for coherent narrative as these can silence, alienate and pathologise individuals. Meanwhile, the research process also highlights the necessity of telling one's story to a caring other, and the predicament between the impossibility of expression and the necessity to tell and to be known. In relation to this, I encourage therapists to stay with

and listen to what is unsayable and unnarratable without demand. Lastly, this thesis puts forth the value of playfulness when working with the concept of narrative coherence and incoherence, calling for a blurring boundary between the two.

Lay Summary

In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, narrative coherence is often regarded as positively related to the client's well-being and it is often viewed as therapeutic to tell a coherent story of oneself. In comparison, narrative incoherence is often portrayed as pathological. This thesis seeks to challenge this dominant view. It asks the questions, do we always experience life in a narrative form, is a coherent narrative always necessary and essential for a good life, and could the demand for narrative coherence also bring negative effect in counselling and psychotherapy? Using myself as an instrument to gain knowledge and regarding writing as a way to think and to know, I explore my research topic through writing about my life experience, my experience as a therapy client and a therapist, as well as my experience of a short-term sandplay process. These writings are interwoven with my reading and thinking about theories. In this continuous cycle of writing, reading and thinking, I seek understanding of the concept of narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy and the realm of experience that is beyond narrative coherence. While recognising the necessity to tell our stories to a caring other, this thesis delves into the inadequacy of telling a coherent narrative of oneself. I argue that the obsession with and demand for narrative coherence without caution can silence, alienate and pathologise individuals. I encourage therapists to stay with and listen to what is unsayable and unnarratable in a linear form without demand.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

By the end of my training to be a counsellor/psychotherapist¹, as part of the final assessment, I was asked to offer a coherent account of my personal and professional development. I wanted to tell the story of my development over those two years of training, but to my surprise, it was more challenging than I ever expected. Although I knew without any doubt that my training had huge impact on me and changed me as a person, I found myself unable to satisfactorily articulate my change and development. The words I could choose, for example, mature, grounded and confident, while holding some truth, always felt inadequate. I was unable to tell a ‘proper’ story of my development, that is a story with a story line: how I started, what I experienced, and where I landed by the time I finished my training. I presented something but it did not feel right. As I listened to my peers’ stories about their development, I admired and was envious of their ability to offer such clear and touching narratives of their development over the two years. In comparison with others, I was left feeling ashamed and in doubt of myself. I had been content with the personal and professional development that I deeply felt. Yet, subjected to the demand for a coherent narrative, I felt inadequate. By then I had already experienced struggles in my personal therapy regarding telling a story of my own and articulating my experience. Instead of telling stories with beginning, middle and end, I told fragments of memories. I was often frustrated in not being able to tell the therapist how I truly felt because the words often felt inadequate or I could not explain my feelings. My experience of the presentation and personal therapy brought me a dreadful thought: ‘I have no story to tell’. Though had not been researching into narrative then, I was familiar with the idea that narrative coherence is seen as closely related to one’s sense of self and identity (e.g. Adler, 2012; Baerger & McAdams, 1999) and that narrative coherence is seen as an indication for psychological well-being (e.g. Baerger &

¹ There are debates upon the use of the terms ‘counselling’ and ‘psychotherapy’. Some use these terms interchangeably, while others argue that they are different (Osagu & Omolayo, 2013). In this thesis, I use the terms counselling and psychotherapy as well as counsellor and psychotherapist interchangeably.

McAdams, 1999). This led me to doubt myself: if I cannot tell a coherent story of myself, does it mean that I have a fragmented sense of self? If so, can I still be a counsellor/therapist? This thought not only brought me a sense of shame but also a crisis. I was distressed.

However, at the same time, I felt a sense of rebellion against the thesis that a coherent narrative is essential for a coherent sense of self and identity. I had felt content with myself and my development. It was when a coherent narrative was required of me that I started to feel ashamed, inadequate and to doubt of myself. *I* did not need a presentation by the end of my training; I saw that specific narrative account as given for others, not for me. This brought me to think about my personal therapy. I also had a sense that sometimes I spoke for my therapist and wanted to be a ‘good’ client who brought ‘proper materials’ for my therapist to work with. Then I had a second thought: is coherent narrative always necessary for a coherent or integrated sense of self, does incoherent narrative always indicate inadequacy, pathology and distress, or in sum, is incoherent narrative always bad and undesirable? Isn’t there other (good) ways of being and living that do not necessarily involve coherent narrative at all times? Is narrative coherence always for the sake of the client?

I revealed this distress in terms of my lack of stories to a peer after the course finished. Somehow, I started to talk about sandplay with her. I remember I told her the reason why I was drawn to sandplay so much was that I felt contentment in sandplay that I hardly felt in talking therapy. I experienced no demand on telling stories in a meaningful and coherent way. I could touch the sand without making sense of anything at all. I felt connected to the world of sand as well as myself without having to know and tell.

Nonetheless, as a practitioner, I do believe in the power of stories. Through my work with my clients, I have seen the power of telling one’s story, having it heard, and making sense of it. I have witnessed and been touched by many stories, which I always see as a privilege.

All these factors entangled with each other, contributing to my ambivalent attitude towards narrative and narrative coherence. I was uncertain and confused. And this is where the inquiry started. It came from a personal and professional longing to

explore and to know. I do not wish to understand just myself. It is a striving to understand the phenomena of narrative, narrative coherence and their relation to life and lived experience.

I had felt alone in my struggle of telling stories. In the process of doing this research project, I have found companionship and comfort in entering dialogue with some thinkers. I hope that this research project can also be a companion to those who have similar experience. At the same time, I hope it can offer those who do not share the same experience a potential different way of looking at life and lived experience. While storytelling is such a main theme in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, I do this research project with a hope to offer practitioners insight into the inner world of clients who, like me, experience struggles in offering a coherent narrative account. By deconstructing what is regarded as coherent narrative, I hope this thesis can assist practitioners to see incoherence beyond pathology and start to rethink what has been often taken for granted.

Therefore, this thesis is conducted with the aim to deconstruct the concept of narrative coherence in the context of counselling and psychotherapy, through which I seek to understand the relation and interplay between narrative, narrative coherence and experience in and of life and explore the potential value of incoherence.

As will be made clear in a later chapter, this research process is not a linear one. It is an organic process of searching, losing and returning. The use of methodology as well as theories are more of encounters in the research process. When I looked back at the research process in later stages, I realised it has elements of interdisciplinary exploration. It situates itself in the context of and contributes mainly to the field of counselling and psychotherapy, yet it also reaches beyond theories within counselling and psychotherapy and use them to make sense of my experience then bring them back to the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Therefore, in chapter 2, I will offer an interdisciplinary literature review on narrative and narrative coherence, and restate my research questions in the end of this review.

In chapter 3, I will show the journey of how I came to my onto-epistemological position and methodological choice. I will explain the rationale for my decision to engage in sandplay sessions as a pathway to gain knowledge of the research topic, and

the rationale for my data generation, analysis and presentation. Sandplay sessions arrangement and ethical consideration will also be given in this chapter.

Chapter 4 to 6 will be collections of my pre-sandplay writings, writing about sandplay sessions and my post-sandplay writings respectively. Each of these pieces of writing will look at the theme of narrative coherence from different theoretical and experiential angles. I will deliberately present these pieces without clear structure with the intention to offer the flow of my thinking and experience, as I see imposing structure and order that are not part of my writing as contradictory to my questioning into the very concept of coherence.

Additionally, the discussion of narrative coherence and incoherence in this thesis is not only written in its content but is also presented in its structure and methodology. Parallel to the emphasis on coherence in counselling and psychotherapy, there is also a requirement for coherence that includes linearity and order in academic writing. In thinking about doing and presenting this thesis, I see this piece of research itself as a methodological experiment which looks for other ways of doing research that is different from traditional rigorous scholarly voice and reach towards the poetics of research (Hope, 1971; Romanyshyn, 2013). Therefore, I have chosen to present a relatively long and more detailed methodology chapter. And here, I would also like to offer some methodological introduction to this thesis.

In July 2018, I submitted a paper on this research topic to a journal where I raised my questions about narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy and deliberately chose not to offer ‘solutions’ to those potential troubles. Instead, I wanted to stimulate readers’ own thinking and wondering. I relinquished the attempt to put the paper into rigorous structure but allowed the writing to proceed as my thoughts did, which gives the paper a taste of montage.

The paper was sent out to three reviewers. It interestingly received very distinct feedback from each of them. The first reviewer highly disapproved of the fact that I offered nothing on what the therapist should do with the client’s experience that defies articulation and narrative, which piques almost no interest on this reviewer as s/he has seen no concrete guidance on therapeutic practice. The second reviewer saw the paper as well-argued and publishable. The third reviewer found it ‘extremely’ and ‘deeply’

interesting and it provoked a great deal of thinking in him/her. This reviewer thus offered very long comments that included his/her thoughts in response to mine, offering alternative ways of looking at the topic. At the same time, as this reviewer found that his/her thinking mainly took the form of a dialogue with me, s/he also provided detailed in-text comments that are dialogic in nature.

The editor summarised that the main concerns about my paper were that it lacks clearly articulated thesis and structure and it needs more rigor and thoroughness for a published journal paper. What initially hit me the most was the editor's comment that the paper often reads like 'a casual conversation' in which I am 'thinking aloud about interesting topics'.

However, as I lay on bed that evening thinking about these comments, I realised, although I do not agree with the word 'casual', yes, what I was doing in that paper and what I will be doing in this thesis are 'thinking aloud' and a 'conversation'.

Implicit in the concerns that the editor raised is an assumption about or an image of scholarship as rigorous, structured and articulate. In fact, more than an assumption, these have become a requirement for scholarship. Implicit in the first reviewer's dissatisfaction are the expectation and requirement for the scholar to know and to offer solutions to problems. It is not enough that you think and question, but you must think and present yourself in a particular way in order to be accepted. If I were to make major revisions and resubmit my paper as the editor suggested, I would need to make my paper rigorous, neatly structured and clearly articulated. I would need to be what the 'academic world' wants me to be in order to be included and accepted. If my research interest had not made me challenge the taken-for-granted requirement for coherence and the rigorous scholarly voice, I would have developed an 'academic self' that strives to perform as certain, intelligent, reasonable and organised – as often required of scholars – without seeing any alternatives. There is a parallel here between this and my argument later that connects disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) and the therapeutic relationship. In both cases, if we do not think twice about what is taken for granted, certain knowledge would be produced and privileged as 'truth' and some others would be excluded and silenced.

‘Thinking aloud’ indicates a process: a thinking process that is shared and laden with uncertainty. And this is exactly my journey of this research project. What would be lost and silenced in the certain scholarly voice are both this research journey and me as the person who has embarked on this journey, who has stepped into the unknown and trusted the process though not without struggles. In the language of Winnicott (1965a) whose work I will refer to later, when I put this experiencing-self at bay to perform the well-articulated, clear and reasonable scholar that is required of me, I am showing a ‘false self’ that complies to what is expected from me rather than the I who actually experiences. While the presence and congruence of the therapist are stressed as so important in counselling and psychotherapy (e.g. Greenberg & Geller, 2001), I wonder why counselling and psychotherapy researchers, especially practitioner-researchers, have to hide aspects of ourselves that are relevant to what we are researching. In my case, it is the inarticulate, the unstructured and what might be called as incoherent.

It has been argued that counselling and psychotherapy research methods that are consistent with the type of therapy that is being researched need to be developed (McLeod, 2001). I would like to argue that if the type of therapy that we do is process-oriented and relationship-oriented, there should be space for a type of research that is process-oriented and relational. So, yes, this research project is ‘thinking aloud’ (process-oriented) taking you through a journey that I do not claim to have mastery over and that is full of uncertainty and hard to plan or predict, just like therapy. And yes, this research project is a ‘conversation’ (relational) where I want to meet you as hopefully a genuine enough person with my thoughts, feelings, strength and vulnerability, like we do in therapy.

I still do not necessarily agree with the word ‘casual’ attributed to my work, but it can depend on what it exactly means. If it means no theoretical engagement, I would disagree. If it means that it lacks the type of research rigor that indicates absolute certainty, organisation and tidiness, then I argue for a different type of rigor. As the third reviewer recognised in my way of writing and the argument I made in my paper a different type of coherence that might not be valued by academic community, reviewers and editors, I argue for a different type of research rigor that breaks the wall around academia that separates or privileges academic community from others. If

‘casual’ means to have a conversation that is accessible to and engages those who are not in academia, then it is exactly what I try to do.

When reading this thesis, you might feel as frustrated as the first reviewer of my journal paper, or you might appreciate it as the second reviewer, or you might feel intrigued as the third reviewer and wish to participate in wondering about this research topic yourself. Now, I invite you to join this journey of emotional, intellectual and embodied engagement with questions about narrative coherence and its relation to life, lived experience and therapy, and to find out for yourself what it will bring to you.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, narrative has taken a significant role. This significance can date back to as early as Sigmund Freud's time – in the 1980s, Schafer (1980) and Spence (1982) explicitly pointed out the narrative perspective of Freud's work. As Meier (2012) describes, narrative is the trunk of the tree from which all the branches of psychotherapy develop. It provides a meeting point for psychotherapy of different traditions (Angus & McLeod, 2004a). As McLeod (1997) acknowledges, narrative in psychotherapy has become a massive topic. It will be beyond the scope of this thesis to review all the related theories on narrative. Therefore, not without struggles, I have chosen to review the aspects of narrative and narrative coherence that are most relevant to my topic.

In this chapter, I will offer an interdisciplinary literature review on narrative and narrative coherence, drawing on main theorists from not only counselling and psychotherapy, but also history, psychology and philosophy whose works are often drawn on when narrative is discussed in relevant literature.

Firstly, I will present the widespread view on narrative that it is not only a tool to make sense of or represent experience, but it is also an act of creating self and identity. Secondly, tracing back to its historical origin, I will present the predominant view on the connection between narrative coherence and mental health which is usually presented by relevant literature as coherent narrative being related to psychological well-being whereas incoherence is seen as related to illness or distress. Then I will take a close look at the concept of narrative coherence. Since I recognise that temporality and causality are commonly identified as the main aspects of coherent narrative, I will review these two aspects and the critiques to them in more details. At the end of this chapter, I will restate my research questions and inquiries.

Narrative and Story

Before delving into narrative and narrative coherence, I would like to clarify the use of the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’.

The concept of narrative itself is slippery and there lacks a simple, clear-cut definition (Byrne, 2003; Riessman & Speedy, 2012). The definition of narrative varies from referring to an entire life story to a discrete unit of discourse (Riessman & Speedy, 2012). Riessman and Speedy (2012:430) identify a definition of narrative that is specifically situated in the context of psychology and sociology: it includes ‘long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple interviews (or therapeutic conversations)’. I see this as particularly relevant to the meaning of narrative in the context of counselling and psychotherapy.

Defining narrative becomes even more complicated and contentious when it comes to differentiating ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ (Byrne, 2003; McQuillan, 2000). The distinction between ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ is fuzzy and a lot of the time they overlap (McLeod, 1997; Neile, 2013). According to McLeod (1997:31), a story is ‘an account of a specific event’, whereas a narrative is ‘a story-based account of happenings, but contains within it other forms of communication in addition to stories’. Arthur Frank, a main figure in the field of story-telling especially story-telling related to illness, in an interview with Neile (2013), also similarly distinguishes story and narrative by ‘specific’ and ‘general’. For Frank, story is when specific events happen in specific settings whereas narrative describes in general terms the types of stories we tell. Both these views seem to coincide with the view that story constitutes one part of narrative (Prince, 2003). Polkinghorne (1988:13), one of the pioneers and leading figures in narrative theories, defines his use of narrative as ‘the kind of organisational scheme expressed in story form’. In all these definitions, narrative includes elements of story in its nature. In addition, both Frank (in Neile, 2013) and McLeod (1997) acknowledge that a main distinction between these two terms is that ‘story’ is more accessible to people in everyday level while ‘narrative’ is usually used in academic discourse. I agree with Frank (in Neile, 2013) on that it is not easy to maintain a strict difference in these two all the time and there are circumstances where these terms can be legitimately used interchangeably. In this thesis, recognising both the differences and

the inseparability between these two terms, I do not seek to maintain clear or strict distinction between these two. I see story as under the wider scope of narrative. As in the definitions mentioned above, I also regard story form as in the nature of narrative. Thus, when I talk about story, I am also talking about narrative; when I talk about narrative, there are inevitable elements of story. In fact, if we search through literature about either narrative or story-telling, we will hardly find writings that strictly separate these two and talk about one without another.

Narrative and Life

Regarding the relation between narrative and life, lived experience and sense of self, there are radically different views which are based on different ontological understandings of them. There are considerable debates on whether narrative is an inherent quality of human life (Andrews, 2010). This is also one of the questions I ask in this thesis. Therefore, in this section I will review literatures related to this aspect, following a brief introduction to the development of interest in narrative in social science.

Scholars widely recognise a ‘narrative turn’ in social science that took place around the 1980s which refers to the growing attention given to people’s narrative or the stories people tell ((Brockmeier, 2004; Brown et al., 1996; Hyvärinen et al., 2010; McLeod, 1997). In 1992, Kreiswirth (1992:629) already recognised the ‘virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative’. It happened in various disciplines such as history (e.g. White, 1980), education (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), psychology (e.g. Bruner, 1986), and psychotherapy (e.g. Schafer, 1980; Spence, 1982). (More detailed reviews of the narrative turn are presented by researchers such as Kreiswirth (1992) and Bochner and Riggs (2014)).

Psychologist Jerome Bruner is one of the pioneers who draw attention to the knowledge that can be gained through stories. He distinguishes two modes of thought. The first is the paradigmatic mode, which employs categorisation and conceptualisation and attempts to fulfil a ‘mathematical system of description and explanation’ (Bruner, 1986:12). It is a logical and scientific way of knowing. It leads to theory, analysis, arguments, empirical discovery and reasoned hypothesis (Bruner, 1986). The second mode of thinking, the narrative mode, leads to stories, gripping

drama and historical account; what it deals with are human and human-like action and intention (ibid).

There would be little doubt that in the world of counselling and psychotherapy, compared to the paradigmatic mode of knowing, we are more concerned with the narrative mode of knowing that Bruner proposes. Therapists recognise the crucial potential of narrative in therapeutic change. For instance, narrative therapy (White, 2007) is an approach developed upon the power of re-authoring one's life story from a perspective different from previous dominant stories one tells themselves about themselves.

If narrative is so crucial to our lives, what is the relationship between narrative, human life and our experiences of life? Louis Mink (1987), a philosopher of history, argues that when past events and actions are narrated, they are imposed by a narrative form that they do not inherently possess. In Mink's (1987:186) opinion, '[...] our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories'. He sees narrative as unable to represent life and past events, and that we can never refer to past events but only 'events under a description' (Mink, 1987:199). In his words, '[s]tories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles and ends' (Mink, 1970:557). For Mink (1970), rather than being transformed to art from life, narrative qualities are seen as transformed from art to life. Historian Hayden White (1980) takes a similar stance to argue that narrative becomes a problem when we try to make events in life get into the form of a story. Barthes (cited in Carr, 1991:14) also asserts that in life everything is 'scrambled messages'. Because of the belief that life does not possess a narrative form with linear proceeding of beginning, middle and end, for theorists like Mink, to attribute real events narrative coherence is 'wishful thinking' at best (Carr, 1991:13).

This view presents a discontinuity between narrative and life as lived (Carr, 1991). It also sees life as experienced as existing beyond and before narrative and language.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur's (1991; 1984) work intends to cross the gap between narrative and life brought by the view that stories are told but not lived and life is lived but cannot be told which more or less puts narrative and life in opposition. For Ricoeur (1991), without being interpreted, life is merely a biological phenomenon, and

narrative plays a mediating role in interpretation. Ricoeur (ibid) sees narrative as an essential part of self-understanding: life can only be understood through the stories we tell about it. Through the network of the 'semantics of actions', we come to understand what action and passion are (Ricoeur, 1991:28). And through narrating, we are able to distinguish and bring together different components of our experience and lives, to reach to the 'synthesis of the heterogeneous' (ibid). Ricoeur (1991:29) believes that there is a pre-narrative quality of human experience that needs narrative, and that life is 'an activity and a passion in search of a narrative'. This indicates that life is embedded in narrative or entangled in (untold) stories before any narrative is told.

Whereas Ricoeur (1991) regards life as in quest of narrative, some other theorists advocate for not only the assertion that narrative is a means of sense-making, but also the view that there is an inherent narrative quality in human life and experience of life (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Carr, 1991; Crites, 1971; Crossley, 2003)

Bruner (2004a:692) writes that '[n]arrative imitates life, life imitates narrative'. In writing this, he argues that life has the same structure of narrative. Similarly, criticising Louise Mink's and Hayden White's views on narrative imposing structure on real life, Carr (1991) argues that narrative form is inherent in human experience and action. To have subjective experience, for Carr (1991:62), is an attempt to 'surmount time in exactly the way the story-teller does', to 'dominate the flow of events by gathering them together in the forward-backward grasp of the narrative act'. Instead of being fragmented and discontinuous, experiences interlock, and this configurational process is what is analogous to narrative (Carr, 1991; Pellauer, 1991). Terrell and Lyddon (1996) also argue that since human make meanings through stories, which in turn prepares as well as constrains future understanding, the narrative structures become the framework for our experience of life. This argument connects to the more radical view of some theorists who argue that narrative *is* life and our narrative of ourselves *is* our sense of ourselves.

As the title of his article *Life as Narrative* suggests, for Bruner (2004a), there is no such thing as 'life itself'. Our life and our experience of life are constructed through our telling about our lives. He argues that our sense of self is closely linked to our narratives (Bruner, 2004b). In fact, he argues that our sense of self is created through our self-narratives to either ourselves or others (ibid). In Bruner's (2004b)

opinion, there does not exist a self inside us ready to be told through words. Instead, through telling ourselves and others about ourselves, we constantly construct and reconstruct our sense of self, and we make up stories about who we are. According to him, self-making is ‘a narrative art’ (Bruner, 2004b:4). Bruner (2004a:694) writes that ‘[i]n the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives’ (Italics original). This view is shared by Sacks (1986) when he writes that each of us *is* a story, a singular narrative that is continuously being constructed.

What these views on narrative and self suggest is that narrative is not merely a representation of life or experience, not merely a tool that helps people make sense of life and experience; more importantly, they claim that narrative determines our experience and that we live by our self-stories (Payne, 2006). Strawson (2004a:428) summarises that there is a widespread agreement in a variety of disciplines claiming that ‘human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort, or at least a collection of stories’. He calls this view about the nature of human experience the *psychological Narrativity thesis*. (He uses Narrativity with uppercase N to denote this specific psychological outlook).

According to these viewpoints, as narrative is so closely related to the sense of self, or it *is* our sense of self, the way one narrates oneself then certainly reveals and affects the psychological well-being of the individual. What is conveyed in these theories is that a coherent narrative indicates a coherent sense of self, and conversely, an incoherent narrative indicates an incoherent sense of self and identity (Brockmeier & Medved, 2010).

Narrative Coherence and Mental Health

As Hyvärinen et al. (2010) point out, narrative is always conceptualised with regard to coherence. There is a dominant view that a coherent story is a ‘good’ story (McAdams, 2006). Narrative coherence occupies a paramount position in mental health discourse (Borg, 2018).

In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, the very first connection between the client’s mental health and the degree of coherence in the client’s narrative was made by the very first psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. In his *Fragment of An Analysis of A Case of Hysteria*, Freud (1953) identifies the incoherence of his patient’s narrative

as an indication of hysteria: the connections, even the ostensible ones, are unclear, and the sequence of events is uncertain. Freud's assumption about the connection between narrative coherence and mental health is evidenced further in one of his footnotes in this paper where he describes an event of assessing a potential patient referred to him. In the first meeting with the patient, Freud (1953:16) had her tell him her history, and '[w]hen the story came out perfectly clearly and connectedly in spite of the remarkable events it dealt with, I told myself that the case could not be one of hysteria'. For Freud (1953:16), his patient's 'inability to give an ordered history of their life' is the 'characteristic of the neurosis'. What is indicated here, according to Marcus (1976:413), is an assumption of narrative coherence, the nature of human life and their relation: '[o]n this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything [...] accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence. And inversely, illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate narrative account of oneself'.

One of the earliest research projects that explicitly raises the connection between narrative coherence and mental health and well-being is the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1996). Drawing from philosopher Grice's (1975) criteria of coherence in rational discourse, Adult Attachment Interview indicates that adults speak about their early memories more coherently in the interview has a secure attachment style whereas a less coherent narrative is associated with insecure attachment style (Hesse, 1999). Main (1991) also suggests that parents who can tell a coherent history of themselves have securely-attached infants, while in comparison, infants of those who offer an incoherent narrative of their history are insecurely attached.

Other early research in the area of narrative coherence and mental health includes Baerger & McAdams's (1999) investigation on life story coherence and its relation to psychological well-being. Through their study, they argue that life story coherence is significantly and positively related to psychological well-being. They also argue that adaptive psychological functioning is the consequence of a coherent narrative of one's life.

These accounts argue for the positive relationship between narrative coherence and well-being. Nowadays, it has become a widely accepted view that narrative coherence acts as an indicator of the client's well-being in psychotherapy (Angus &

McLeod, 2004a). Coherence is thought of as linked to an individual's ability to sustain continuity, directionality and meaning in life (Brockmeier & Medved, 2010). As Brockmeier & Medved (2010) point out, there is extensive agreement that individuals who speak coherently about themselves have higher levels of psychological well-being and people who offer incoherent accounts of themselves have more or less psychological difficulties. In mental health literature, incoherent narrative is often written in association to psychotic states (e.g. Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002), trauma (e.g. Guilfoyle, 2018; Neimeyer et al., 2006), and illness (e.g. Frank, 1998; 2013), which serves to portray narrative incoherence as somehow undesirable.

Narrative coherence is thus viewed as a positive outcome of or the goal of psychotherapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004a). As McAdams (2006) suggests, therapists and clients co-construct – taking the constructivist point of view – new narratives to replace incoherent or disorganised narratives, and moving towards a more coherent narrative is the ideal direction of therapeutic movement. It is often assumed that talking about past experience in a coherent way brings benefits (Waters & Fivush, 2015). Especially in the case of trauma, it is suggested that a main function of therapy is to transform chaos into coherence, to story the unstoried (e.g. Guilfoyle, 2018; Neimeyer et al., 2006).

Therefore, as Hyvärinen et al. (2010:1) summarise, coherence is often seen as a virtue, the 'ultimate guarantor of the quality of narratives', and is assumed to be 'a norm for good and healthy life stories'.

The Concept of Narrative Coherence

Then what exactly does 'narrative coherence' mean? Interestingly, while narrative coherence is given a paramount place in discussion of mental health, it is loosely and not explicitly defined. Nonetheless, there are some social science scholars who have explicitly offered various definitions of narrative coherence and what constitutes a coherent narrative (e.g. Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Linde, 1993; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991).

Shapiro and Hudson (1991) define coherent narrative as a narrative that is temporally and causally organised into a sequence that is meaningful to the teller and the listeners. In this definition, narrative coherence is concerned with the overall

structure of the narrative. The sequence of events need to interrelate in a meaningful way (for both parties). Temporality and causality stand out as two main elements of coherent narrative in this definition. As can be seen later as this literature review proceeds, temporality and causality are indeed what are generally regarded as core elements of narrative coherence despite different definitions and descriptions of narrative coherence.

Baerger and McAdams' (1999), Habermas and Bluck's (2000) and Linde's (1993) contributions on the constitution of narrative coherence are among the most cited literature in this area.

Baerger and McAdams (1999) propose a model of life story coherence that includes four features: orientation (the narrative provides a beginning with orientation that offers the listeners background information that is necessary to understand the life story), structure (the life story offers a culturally recognised story structure), affect (the emotional aspects of the story-telling), and integration (the narrator's ability to organise pieces of a life into a story which is congruent with the narrator's history, motivation, central conflicts, aspirations, etc.). Elaborating the requirement of structure, Baerger and McAdams (1999) recognise that in lots of narrative traditions, a primary device that establishes narrative coherence is temporal or sequential ordering. According to Baerger and McAdams (1999:73) what temporal ordering necessitates for life story is that it needs to 'display some degree of linear, chronological, or causal structure'. Although temporality and causality are not explicitly listed in Baerger and McAdams' (1999) model of life story coherence, as illustrated, they are addressed in the structure feature of a coherent life story.

In Habermas and Bluck's (2000) proposal of four types of global coherence of life story, together with the cultural concept of biography and thematic coherence, temporality and causality are listed as two of the main types of coherence. Similarly, Linde (1993) sees temporal order as a fundamental principle for narrative. According to Linde (1993), narrative ordering acts as the basis for two coherence principles: causality and continuity.

As Pals (2006) summarises, the concept of coherence often highlights both the structure of narration including temporal sequences and the more interpretive aspects including explanation of the cause of events and the evaluative significance of events

for the narrator. In other words, coherence indicates that the narrator ‘interprets a past experience as having a causal impact that endures over time and contains self-defining significance or meaning in his or her life’ (Pals, 2006:177).

The notion of coherence, as Brockmeier and Medved (2010) point out, dates back to Aristotelian narrative which is a well-structured story. Brockmeier and Medved (2010:19) describe it as having ‘a clear, temporally ordered plot with a dramatic complication that eventually is solved’ and having in its components ‘an act (with a beginning and an end), a scene, an agent, agency, and a purpose’. It is a classical or traditional narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Although in contemporary literature, narrative coherence is more narrowly defined (Brockmeier & Medved, 2010), the trace of Aristotle’s criteria of a good story is present. As Andrews (2010) raises, there is a certain pressure for us to deliver our stories within an Aristotelian narrative configuration which demands connection between events and congruence, between conclusion and episodes.

Regarding the Aristotelian concept of coherence, Hyvärinen et al. (2010) comment that whereas Aristotle’s aesthetic and normative concepts of coherent story are originally only concerned with good drama particularly tragedy, in modern society these concepts started to be applied to narrative and narrativity in general, which limits the understanding of narratives.

Since temporality and causality are regarded as the main parameters of narrative coherence, I would like to take a closer look at these two notions and critiques towards them respectively.

Temporality, Ordering and Organising

Temporality is usually characterised by sequentiality and order. This is evidenced in Linde’s (1993:107) argument: ‘[...] a story has a beginning, middle, and end, and is properly told in that order. Without a sequence of events, we do not have a story. We may have something – a description, an explanation, a mood piece – but we do not have a story’. McLeod (1997:34), elaborating Bruner’s work, writes that ‘[n]arrative is [...] the mode of communication and representation that best captures the experience of temporality, of living in time’. This corresponds to Ricoeur’s (1984:3) notion that ‘[t]he world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world’.

Habermas and Bluck (2000) identify that in coherent narrative, events are temporally related to one another. As Brockmeier (2004) summarises, in narrative studies, coherence is always conceptualised as an issue of temporal organisation and of ordering a story in time. He goes on to point out, as Hyvärinen et al. (2010) also do, that ‘temporal ordering is commonly considered to be one (if not *the*) basic feature of narrative’ (Brockmeier, 2004:286). It is worth noting that in saying temporality, though it is usually referred to as linear time, it does not necessarily equal linearity. In Ricoeur’s (1985, 1984) famous discussion of time and narrative, he raises the paradoxes of time, the triple present of the past, present and future. He thinks that ‘[e]mplotment is never the simple trump of ‘order’’ (Ricoeur, 1984:73). As Hyvärinen et al. (2010:8) summarise, for Ricoeur, narrative is ‘above all an attempt to cope with the ‘discordant’ aspects of acting and suffering’. Nonetheless, the ‘ordering’ aspect of narrative is stressed when Ricoeur (1991:28) argues that through the network of narrative, we reach ‘the synthesis of the heterogeneous’. To be more precise, this indicates the function of narrative as organising the disparate elements of our lived experience. Although Carr (1991:65) criticises Ricoeur’s work, I see their similarities in viewing this aspect of narrative when he writes that narrating is our ‘primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our experience’. This view is also taken by Crossley (2003:291) who sees narrative as constituting an ‘organising principle’ for human action and life.

In fact, it is this supposed ‘ordering’ and ‘organising’ feature of narrative that is often regarded as a main therapeutic function of narrating (e.g. McAdams et al., 2006; Pennebaker & Seagel, 1999). According to McLeod (1997:37), ‘re-casting chaotic experiences into causal sequences’ helps the client to ‘gain an understanding of how and why something happened’. (This view also indicates another principle of coherence – causality – as Linde (1993) suggests). Through narrative, people understand the past and plan for the future (Polkinghorne, 1988), and synthesise episodic memories to convey who they are, how they come to be and where their future life is going (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This sense of control narrating can offer is seen as empowering, especially for traumatised clients (Borg, 2018).

In Strawson’s (2004a:428) language, he calls the view that ‘experiencing or conceiving one’s life as a narrative is a good thing, a richly Narrative outlook is

essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood' the *ethical Narrativity thesis*, which is often coupled with the psychological Narrativity thesis mentioned earlier. Strawson's (2004a, 2004b, 2010) challenge to these claims mainly rests on the temporality and continuity of narrative. He distinguishes between two types of self-experience – Diachronic and Episodic self-experience – to challenge the idea that coherent narrative being in time is predominantly good, and to propose that there are deeply non-Narrative people and there are ways of being that are also good. Although his division of two types of self-experience runs the risks of oversimplification and dualism, it provides alternative ways of looking at narrative coherence and the possibility of a 'good life' without necessary emphasis on narrative. Thus, I would like to elaborate here on his critique of coherent narrative and narrativity.

Strawson (2004a:430) defines Diachronic self-experience as seeing oneself as having 'relatively long-term diachronic continuity, something that persists over a long stretch of time, perhaps for life'. Strawson (2004a) thinks that people who are Diachronic, which most people are, are also Narrative in their outlook on life. In comparison, if one is Episodic, s/he does not figure him/herself as what was there in the further past nor will be there in the future, though being perfectly aware of his/her long-term continuity considered as a whole human being. Strawson sees Episodics as having less tendency to see their life in Narrative terms.

It is necessary to elaborate on what Strawson means by Episodic self-experience and Episodic life. For Episodic, they know perfectly well that they have a past and they have factual knowledge and memories about their past. However, they do not have a sense of their lives as narrative with or without form, and there is no great deal of interest or concern for the past and/or the future (Strawson, 2004a). Taking himself as an example, Strawson (2004a:433) explains that '[...] it seems clear to me, when I am experiencing or apprehending myself as a self, that the remoter past or future in question is not my past or future, although it is certainly the past or future of GS [G. Strawson] the human being'. When he is considering himself as a self, he says, 'I have no significant sense that *I* – the I now considering this question – was there in the further past' (ibid). For Episodics, though with perfect knowledge that they are the same human being in the past, present and future, they do not register the past

as happening to the currently experiencing *me* (ibid). This experience of being in time breaks the assumed temporal continuity of a coherent narrative and narrative identity.

For Strawson, being Episodic is not inadequate nor pathological. It is simply a way of being and experiencing life. Responding to the dominant claim that narrative is necessary, that we are the stories we tell about ourselves, that we understand our lives and experiences in narrative form, and that a good life must include a good self-narrative, Strawson (2004a:436) asks ‘why on earth, in the midst of the beauty of being, it should be thought to be important to do this’. He thinks that people who propose this claim are motivated by their own significance which is not necessarily present for other human-beings, and the psychological Narrativity thesis is speaking about themselves or people alike. However, though it is true for them, it is not necessarily true for others, and ‘many are likely to be thrown right off their own truth by being led to believe that Narrativity is necessary for a good life’ (Strawson, 2004a:437). Aligning with Strawson, I will argue in this thesis that to claim all human-beings live in narrative form and a good life must contain coherence narrative is to make a truth claim which, as any propositions that claim something to hold truth do, serves to suppress what is outside of its reign; it is to deny, silence and do violence to what can be different.

Causality, Explanation, Control and Meaning

Habermas and Bluck (2000) equal causal coherence to explanatory coherence. Indeed, causality usually entails explanation. They argue that causal coherence is used to explain changes in the narrator (ibid). Linde (1993) sees adequate causality as a chain of causality that is accepted by the listener of the narrative as a good reason for some events. When there is inadequate causality in the life story told, the individual’s life is viewed as proceeding at random and thus as meaningless (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Linde, 1993). What is beneath the argument that a main function of narrative is to help people to make sense of their experiences (e.g. Pennebaker & Seagel, 1999) is the causality or explanatory principle. When we say we can make sense or understand something, it usually implies that we know more or less the reason for something. If the listeners struggle to make sense of it, a narrative may be regarded as not plausible enough and the narrator needs to render further explanation to increase plausibility (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Linde, 1993). As narrators (of our life stories), in being able to offer causality or explanation, we gain a sense of control (Pennebaker & Seagel,

1999), purpose (McAdams, 1985; McAdams & McLean, 2013) and thus meaning. A meaningful life then seems to be a plausible story or can be told as a plausible story.

The sense of control offered by a coherent story proffers the narrator the status of being the author of one's own life, which is often regarded as serving to empower the narrator (Borg, 2018). What is implicit in the causal and explanatory aspects of coherence is that one can construct a narrative of oneself with full autonomy and that one can potentially have full knowledge of oneself. Yet, it is this act of rendering individuals as fully accountable for their narrative and coherence that is based on mastery and control that Butler (2004; 2005) criticises. This is the critique that my writings in later chapters will draw on.

Butler (2004; 2005) argues against the proposition of an autonomous self who can give a full coherent account of oneself. Her argument is based on her belief in the fundamental relationality and sociality in our being (ibid). She starts her argument with human vulnerability that we cannot argue against (Butler, 1997, 2004). In her earlier work, she raises linguistic vulnerability (Butler, 1997). We are given a name, and addressed by language that is prior to our existence and beyond our control. Later, Butler (2004) furthers linguistic vulnerability to fundamental human vulnerability, meaning that we are exposed to injury, loss and violence, and that we are impressionable. This follows from 'our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure' (Butler, 2004:20).

Butler develops her argument against an autonomous self with mastery and full control on the base of human-being's exposure to loss and grief. In the face of losing an other we do not simply undergo separation from the other, but also the attachment with the other that in part constitutes who we are. We are faced with the questions of whom I am without you, and what I have lost in losing you, which perhaps cannot be fully explained (Butler, 2004). This exposes our 'unknowingness' and the 'unconscious imprint of [our] primary sociality' (Butler, 2004:28) In grief, one cannot choose, plan or predict, rather (Butler, 2004:21):

One is hit by waves, and [...] one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know

why. Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan,
one's own knowing and choosing.

What Butler (2004) argues here is that loss shows us the fundamental relationality of our being. We are not only done by the relation to others but also undone by it; we are vulnerable to the dispossession whose meaning we cannot fully explain. Something gets hold of us, which claims that we are not the master of ourselves. The primary and fundamental tie to others that constitutes us cannot always be recounted or explained, which challenges our notions of ourselves as autonomous and in control. In her discussion, Butler (2004) proposes a conception of self that is impressed upon and by others, that is not fully in our own control or clearly predictable. As she writes (Butler, 2005:37):

The 'I' can tell neither the story of its own emergence
nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing
witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have
been present, which are prior to one's own origins that
one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative
knowledge.

According to Butler (2004:29-39), denial and fear of the human vulnerability and self-unknowingness drive us to 'a fantasy of mastery' and 'a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly'.

If, as much literature suggests, a coherent narrative has in it causality and plausible explanation, in my opinion, it is to ask for the mastery that we do not have over ourselves. It is to hold us fully accountable for ourselves and to deny the limit of self-knowledge or the unknowingness in our formation. Perhaps it could be empowering to tell a coherent narrative. However, requiring a coherent narrative of oneself at all times can be a violent act to an individual as a relational being whose primary relations are not all the time available to conscious knowledge (Butler, 2005).

Social and Relational Dimension of Coherent Narrative

Following Butler's (2004) argument of the fundamental relationality of our being and the impossibility of full mastery, I would also like to briefly review the aspect of social and relational demand in coherent narrative.

The social and relational dimension of narrative has indeed been widely addressed in literature (e.g. Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bruner, 2004b; Linde, 1993). Many narrative theorists take a social constructivism stance. Narrative is seen as a practice of social interaction (Brockmeier, 2004). Ricoeur (1991) believes that a story's completion lies on the living receiver's reading, which emphasise this interactive aspect of narrative. Narrative coherence then also has a strong, if not fundamental, social and relational dimension.

Life story or narrative in general as psychosocial is widely accepted. However, the violence that can be induced by requiring a coherent narrative is not widely discussed.

According to Baerger and McAdams (1999) and McAdams (2006), there are collective assumptions regarding certain rules a story should follow (though it might vary in different cultures). When these rules are violated, the story told may strike the audience as incoherent (McAdams, 2006). Such a story is often confusing and disconcerting for the audience (McAdams, 1997). Therefore, when the assumed rules of a coherent story are broken, as the audience, we tend to reorganise it, to fill the void ourselves or to ask for more details or information in order to make sense (McAdams, 2006). As the audience, we have the need to hear coherent stories, to not to be confused or disconcerted. We also tend to remember better the stories that have a higher percentage of events on the causal chain (Trabasso et al., 1984).

As Linde (1993:3) writes, '[i]n order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, social proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story'. As mentioned earlier, in order to not present one's life as proceeding at random which brings a sense of meaninglessness to others and ourselves – or perhaps ourselves who live through others' gaze – we need to offer a plausible coherent enough story giving plausible enough explanation. Hyvärinen et al. (2010:7) comment that the requirement for a

canonical model of story runs the risk of transforming one's narrative as a 'curriculum vitae demanded by others'.

To conclude, coherent narrative is a social demand. This demand more or less renders us as accountable for the events of our lives, demanding the mastery that we do not possess and denying the opacity of our formation (Butler, 1997, 2004, 2005).

Conclusions and Inquiries

Discussion in this literature review makes clear the predominant view on the positive relation between narrative coherence and psychological well-being as well as the portrayal of narrative incoherence as undesirable. It also reveals existing debates about the relation between narrative, life and lived experience.

In the predominant literature and theories about narrative, Hyvärinen et al. (2010) recognise what they call the coherence paradigm which asserts that 1) competent narratives always proceed linearly and chronologically with beginning, middle and end and with thematic closure; 2) the function of narrative and story-telling is to create coherence to experience; 3) individuals live a better and more ethical life when they have a coherent life story. To challenge the coherence paradigm, Hyvärinen et al. (2010:7) pose the question: 'Can narrative coherence be a harmful phenomenon, how, and in which context?' This is also part of my inquiry in this thesis.

As Jackson and Mazzei (2013:265) write, '[w]hat is central is at the expense of what is marginal'. In centralising narrative coherence as desirable and claiming narrative form is necessary for life and lived experience, what is outside of this realm and what does not fit this specific claim are marginalised and pathologised, which Strawson's (2004a, 2004b, 2010) argument suggests. To insist on a coherent, mastered self-narrative on oneself at all times, according to Butler (2004, 2005), can do violence to the individual's actual experiencing and one's innate self-unknowingness.

In existing critiques and questionings on narrative coherence, there is a lack of discussion that engages with this toptic from a reflective and experiential first-person place. For example, Hyvärinen et al. (2010) critique the coherence paradigm theoretically, methodologically and ethically from multiple disciplines, but how narrative incoherence is experienced and what it is like to be required of coherence are not shown. Although Strawson (2004a, 2004b, 2010) writes in a first-person voice, his

experience is taken as an example for his philosophical argument and the world of incoherence is not present. In the field of counselling and psychotherapy which is concerned with human experience, reflective and experiential texts, especially those that give insight from the client's perspective, make a profound contribution to the development of knowledge and practice in the field. Currently such texts in the topic of narrative coherence and incoherence in the context of counselling and psychotherapy are lacking. This is one of the reasons why I believe my thesis can make a unique contribution to the field.

Starting from a personal place, aligned with Strawson (2004a, 2004b, 2010), Hyvärinen et al. (2010) and Freeman (2010), I ask the following questions: Do life and lived experience necessarily require narrative structure? To what extent is a coherent narrative essential for psychological and emotional well-being? Does coherent narrative always serve well *for* the narrator or the client? How can we think about narrative coherence and incoherence anew?

In asking these questions, I seek to deconstruct the concept of narrative coherence that is often taken for granted. My thesis is not anti-narrative nor against coherence. To deconstruct the concept of narrative coherence is not to replace coherence with incoherence. Deconstruction, according to Derrida (1997:6), is made of 'the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break'. The deconstruction of the concept of narrative coherence in this thesis is not a destruction of coherence or narrativity, but a constant engagement with this tension between the preservation of them and heterogeneity, the newness, the break to see how the dominant interpretation and emphasis on narrative coherence have been produced (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Derrida (1997) sees deconstruction as to show that things, whether it is beliefs, concepts, texts or anything else, do not have definable and stable meanings. Deconstruction is to stretch beyond boundaries, to push against limits, and to disturb tranquillity (ibid). In this sense, doing this thesis itself is already to think about narrative coherence anew, to think about coherence in a way that does not equal unity, harmony, closure and linearity (Freeman, 2010). In this way, the binary between coherence and incoherence can be broken.

For the time being, when I discuss narrative coherence in this thesis, I am referring to the concept of narrative coherence that puts emphasis on temporality, causality and what both of them entail.

Chapter 3 Coming into My Methodology and Onto- Epistemological Position

In this chapter, I will offer an account on locating my research focus and methodology, through which the rationale for my critical engagement with writing as inquiry as methodology will be explained. Because my research topic is concerned with narrative and lived experience and my methodology involves substantial amount of writing, it is necessary to clarify my onto-epistemological position in terms of language, experience and the relationship between them. In writing about how I have come to locate my research focus and methodology, I found myself unavoidably also speaking about my onto-epistemological position. Therefore, I have decided not to state my onto-epistemological position in a separate chapter, but to integrate my discussion on ontology, epistemology and methodology in this chapter.

I will firstly offer how I have come (back) to this research topic which is consistent with my ontological and epistemological positions. Reflecting on the journey of locating my research topic, I recognise that I have engaged in the searching for the ‘right’ research question and the internal knowing through tacit knowledge and that I have engaged in writing as a way to know and think, which led me to consider the use of writing as inquiry in this research project. I will also explain my rationale for going into sandplay sessions myself as a pathway to gain knowledge of my research topic. This is followed by an introduction to sandplay therapy, a brief account of the sandplay sessions arrangement and ethical considerations. In the last section of this chapter, I will make explicit what counts as ‘data’ and how the processes of data generation and analysis are inseparable in this research project. I will also explain in this section my decision of presenting my thesis as a collection of writings on my research topic rather than a systematic whole and how this way of data presentation is consistent with my research topic.

Methodology and Onto-Epistemology

Returning to the Heart

*We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot

Locating my research focus and methodology has not been a linear process. It has been a process of wondering and searching, losing and returning.

I had travelled a long journey in deciding on this research topic. Looking at it retrospectively, I realised that it was a bumpy journey on attuning to the internal call; a call from inside to know what has not yet been known (Sela-Smith, 2002). I had most of the time followed the lead of my academic brain, not my heart. My research topic moved from theoretical exploration regarding lived experience and language to researching others' experience of sandplay therapy regarding playing and talking. I settled on one topic, started to research into it but then found myself unable to continue.

The mismatch between the personal internal call and the research topics I previously engaged with created tension that stopped me from engaging with the research wholeheartedly. This tension drove me to change my research focus again and again.

After talking and thinking about the personal meaning of the research project in my personal therapy, I started to engage with the difficulty in talking about my experience. As explained in the introduction, this difficulty and struggle regarding telling my own stories and being articulate, have brought me a strong sense of shame. This might have prevented me from engaging with my research project on a personal level. Realising this, I gradually started the road of attuning to the internal call and integrating my professional, personal and research lives.

Sandplay, a powerful pathway to the psyche (Kalff, 2004), touches my soul in my every wordless encounter with it as a 'sandplayer'. I previously decided to research clients' experience of sandplay therapy. While holding in my heart questions and ambivalence regarding the use of language and the arguments for narrative coherence in therapy, which I was not aware of then, my striving for my research project had all been establishing an order and coherence that were supposed to bring the comfort of certainty.

Yet this striving brought agonising discomfort. In the search of the step-by-step order and coherence, I moved further and further away from what stands in my heart. I tried to force a shape into the shapeless that I intended to explore – the unspeakable, the incoherence and the possible need for not making sense. This striving for putting my research 'in place' and into linearity is doomed to be a turning away from heart.

As Polkinghorne (2005) recognises, there is contested philosophical debate regarding the relationship between language and experience, in the continuum from experience precedes language (e.g. Husserl) to experience is constructed by language (e.g. Derrida). Because of my personal experience, for instance, my sandplay experience, I hold a view that experience holds preverbal elements and is more complex than words. When I came across Gendlin, his work touched me as if I found a bosom friend. For Gendlin (2004), our bodies carry implicit intricacy. It is implicit in the way that it cannot yet be articulated or symbolised. Very little of what we feel is in the form of explicit verbal symbol (Gendlin, 1997a). This is the ontological common ground that I share with Gendlin.

However, there is something unsettling for me. Gendlin (2004) sees a close relationship between language and body. Knowing, for him, is a process that is both embodied and languaged (Todres, 2007). The physically felt experiencing is concrete as it is what we can inwardly point to or pay attention to (Gendlin, 1997a). In this inward searching, the kind of language that is bodily engaged can come. Gendlin is not at all advocating that experience can or should be 'accurately represented'. For him, language is more complex than a representation of experience (Gendlin, 2004). What he argues for is the healthy relationship between language and the embodied

knowing. He advocates for the coming of language that is embodied, for the searching of the 'good words' that carry the meaning forward (Todres, 2007). The body and the implicit knowledge it carries knows the language; it seeks for what needs to be said precisely (Gendlin, 1995). 'Our bodies imply what we want to say', as he writes (Gendlin, 1997b:28). I have experienced the bodily relief Gendlin talks about when the 'good words' were found.

For Gendlin, the bodily experience one lives through can be more than words can say, yet it looks for words or symbolisation (Todres, 2007). However, for me, the silenced doubt about the assumed necessity of searching for or coming to symbolisation hovers. Here are some examples. I tried numerous times, with other people or by myself, to talk about my personal development through my counselling training, but I still have not yet come to symbolisation that provides me with the relief I look for. I talked about the family loss due to an abortion in groups, supervision, personal therapy and with friends and colleagues; I wrote letters to my unborn sibling. However, I have never felt this experience of family and personal loss that haunts me has been satisfyingly told or even can be satisfyingly told and understood by others and myself. I have had several chances to do sandplay myself and each time it offered me powerful experience that I am not able to describe. In spite of my research and learning on sandplay, communication with sandplay therapists and my reflection, I am still not able to give my sandplay experience satisfactory voices, not to mention 'full' voices. What I do know is that I feel content during the play. If it is not for the purpose of research, learning or communication, I do not feel a strong need to verbalise these profound experience.

Though suggesting a more dynamic and interactive relationship between lived experience and symbolisation, Gendlin's theory, at least in my reading of it, carries the belief on the therapeutic effect of coming into symbolisation, of giving lived experience a form, no matter if it is language, image or other creative forms. My doubt about this has always been in my heart but I had felt pressure, in terms of time and academic rigor, to settle myself onto-epistemologically in order to carry on my research methodologically. Settling myself onto-epistemologically on Gendlin's philosophy about language and lived experience and conducting heuristic inquiry sounds coherent. It is coherent to a good extent, except that I muted the part of me that

does not sit quite well with the epistemological position Gendlin takes, that doubts the very thing that we often do in therapy room as clients and therapists – telling stories, making sense, giving order to chaos and the fragmented. I told myself that I am establishing coherence in my ontology, epistemology and methodology for my research project not for my life. So perhaps this is what needs to be muted.

Thankfully, writing a conference paper about narrative and psychotherapy later on gave me a chance to find the part of myself from which this thesis's inquiry starts. It gave me a chance to temporarily step away from the research project. I allowed myself to write about my doubts, uncertainty, questions and shame. I wrote into my experience in response to relevant literature. While dialoguing with literature, the part of me that finds relief, comfort, contentment, containment and companionship in narrating and the part of me that feels frustrated, forced, discontent and agitated in having to generate coherent narrative also constantly interacted with each other. In this back and forth process, I drew on my personal, professional and research experiences. Although it was unsettling, it was the first time that I felt the coming together of these parts. I was not only using my academic brain but also my experiencing-self in writing. This suits a core belief and striving of mine as a counselling and psychotherapy researcher and practitioner – these two parts need to come together if we aim at generating knowledge that informs better practice.

As Pelias (2004:9) writes, '[t]he alchemy that separates the head from the heart finds no gold'. When I previously ignored and hid my epistemological unsettlement, it had caused a separation between the research project and myself, between the self in life, in practice, and the self in research. I had come to a point where I treated my research project as merely a wearisome task that just needed to be finished on time, so that I could move on with my life.

When I was able to write about what is closer to my heart, which is what stands closer to the onto-epistemological position I hold, I rediscovered my eagerness to explore the idea of narrative and narrative coherence in psychotherapy about which I had gained embodied, though implicit, knowledge in my life and in sandplay, but had been lost. It was in the following research supervision meeting where I saw the possibility, or even the necessity, to relinquish the previous striving and free myself to

do research in a way that is consistent with my onto-epistemological position. I was then able to go into the incoherence and fragmented not only theoretically and experientially, but also methodologically by letting go of what I have perceived as the neat, organised, and rigorous way of doing research.

In his book *The Wounded Researcher – Research with Soul in Mind*, Romanyshyn (2013:4) proposes that research with soul in mind is a process of ‘re-search’, a process of remembering what we know but had forgotten or discovering what we already have known but without knowing it. Laying in the relationship between the researcher and the research topic is ‘a weight of history that waits to be spoken’ (Romanyshyn, 2013:4). Knowing for me in this thesis indeed is remembering and returning.

‘Losing an object is the psyche’s way of finding it’, as Mogenson (2016:18) writes. Looking back at the process of coming to my research topic, I have a strong sense of the research topic finding me as much as I find it. It is a process of finding, losing and returning with different insight and experiences.

Writing the Heart

This is how I write: as if the secret that is in me were before me.

(Speedy, 2008:137)

This process of turning to the self of the researcher resonates with Heuristic Inquiry proposed by Moustakas (1990) which stresses the importance of finding the ‘right’ research question. The research question, for Moustakas (1990), is deeply felt and has an emotional effect on the researcher that cannot be ignored.

The discovery of the research topic is an inner search, an internal calling from the self (Sela-Smith, 2002). In Moustakas’s (1990:39) words:

All heuristic inquiry begins with the internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment

to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood.

The starting point of heuristic inquiry is an initial engagement with searching for and clarifying the topic that we want to research (West, 2001). This search comes from an intuitive place (Sela-Smith, 2002) and the process of it cannot be hurried (West, 2001). As Sela-Smith (2002:65) puts it: this phase 'is like the attention-getting circumstance pointing to something that cannot yet be seen but has the smell of significance that draws any scientist into inquiry'. The researcher perhaps does not even know what needs to be done, but there is a sense that something of significance is calling out from the inward that cannot be dismissed (Sela-Smith, 2002). As explained previously, this indeed is my experience of locating my research topic.

An essential component of heuristic inquiry is the concept of tacit knowledge suggested by Polanyi (1983). The belief brought by this concept is that 'we can know more than we can tell' and much of the knowledge we have cannot be put into words (Polanyi, 1983:4). A widely used example of tacit knowledge is that we can recognise the face of a friend from a crowd of people yet we are usually not able to articulate how we do that (Polanyi, 1983). Polanyi (1983:15) writes:

'Our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical. In all our waking moments we are relying on our awareness of contacts of our body with things outside for attending to these things.'

The tacit dimension of knowing is the internal place where feelings, experience and meaning join and together form a more whole picture of the world and a way of navigating the world (Sela-Smith, 2002). Asserting that the internal pathway of self is the way to know, heuristic inquiry encourages connectedness and intimacy with the phenomenon being studied (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). In heuristic inquiry, the phenomenon is being understood within the researcher. The research process starts and ends with the researcher's inner being (West, 2001). Heuristic inquiry 'opens to knowledge that is embedded and integrated within the self through understanding of the self in relation to and in context of the dynamic whole' (Sela-Smith, 2002:55).

The emphasis on the self of the researcher and the internal pathway to know makes heuristic inquiry a match for my research project. In fact, instead of deciding to do heuristic inquiry, I recognised my research process in my reading of heuristic inquiry. My narrative above illustrates the finding of the ‘right’ research question in heuristic inquiry.

Although I find resonance in the rationale of heuristic inquiry, I find that the heuristic phases (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis) suggested by Moustakas (1990) does not give enough space for the uncertainty and ambivalence involved in my research project. From my perspective, the suggestion of these phases indicates a belief that there is an essence to be shed light on, to be explicated. The phases seem to suggest a sense of organisation or ‘putting in order’, whereas in my inquiry, I question the necessity of order and explication. Starting from a place of ambivalence and uncertainty, this thesis intends to shed light on the pathway to think explicitly about the implicit emphasis on narrative coherence, but I do not expect a promising ‘answer’ to the searching. I do not wish to turn this ambivalence into certainty or offer resolution. I wonder how we can give pre-determined phases to a journey without a set destination that wanders into the unknown.

Referring back to the process of writing the conference paper, I recognised it was indeed a process where ‘thoughts happened in the writing’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:972) that writing as a method of inquiry stresses. I arrived at places that I did not expect before. I came up with associations and thoughts that I did not have prior to the writing. I felt what I was not aware of during the writing. The knowing did not come from design. While heuristic inquiry seems to offer a ‘promise’ that the essence of the researched phenomena can be known through being lived in the researcher, writing as inquiry allows more space for uncertainty. Writing as inquiry ‘assumes and expresses a curiosity or even a thirst for knowledge about the contents of the study, but has no illusions that this might speak for itself. It leaves much unsaid, uncertain, and incomplete’ (Speedy, 2008:138-139). These words capture the nature of my inquiry in this thesis.

In heuristic inquiry, the knowing happens intuitively and bodily, and the writing or creative synthesis is a process of bringing together the experience and

understanding emerged in the research (Kenny, 2012). In other words, in heuristic inquiry, writing is the representation of what has been known by the researcher. In comparison, in writing as inquiry, writing itself is a process to know.

My process of writing the conference paper was a process of coming to know. It was coming to know more about both the subject of research – narrative in/coherence in the context of counselling and psychotherapy – and my own position towards the subject. Instead of ‘writing-up’ in which the author knows what they want to compose, I engaged in the ‘writing into’ in which the author comes to realise their beliefs and finds the language that crystallises their thoughts (Pelias, 2011). In this process, I came to know what I know through writing (ibid). Deep inside, I have always known the crucial impact my ambivalence towards language and narrative has in my personal life, professional practice and research. However, it was only in writing which is also the process of thinking that these came together.

Writing as inquiry is a process of realisation which can emerge as ‘is-ness’ or ‘perhaps-ness’ (Pelias, 2011:660). I find this feature of writing as inquiry relieving because of the ambivalent nature of my inquiry. The fact that writing as inquiry challenges the assumption of linearity and taken-for-granted written forms (Speedy, 2005) particularly suits my tentative challenge towards narrative coherence and linear stories in psychotherapy.

Writing as inquiry shares with heuristic inquiry the valuing of the self of the researcher; it is ‘writing from our Selves’ (Richardson, 2000:924). As Pelias (2011:659) writes, ‘when I write, I am asserting a self, insisting that I matter’. The writing researcher is the instrument; the knowing of the self and the knowing of the researched phenomena is intertwined (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). When writing as inquiry acts as personal realisation, it tells the writer about themselves, their beliefs and their sense-making; and ‘their writing becomes a location for readers’ consideration’, acting also as public argument (Pelias, 2011:660).

Sela-Smith (2001, 2002), bringing forth a crucial critique to Moustakas’ heuristic inquiry, argues that to avoid the personal pain connected to the research topic and process, the heuristic researcher can move from concrete experience to the abstraction of thinking about experience (Sela-Smith, 2001). She recognises two

ambivalent and conflicting processes within Moustakas' method in his study of loneliness. The first one is a self-search based on the feeling self of the researcher, while the second one moves away from the experiencing self to the phenomena as if it is an object outside of the self. Sela-Smith (2001) critiques that this second process loses the internal focus of the researcher as the feeling person. When this happens, what is learnt is from an observational perspective rather than from within the experience, which is in contrast with the fundamental stance of heuristic inquiry.

Different from Sela-Smith who is against the observational perspective of the researcher and Moustakas who seems not to recognise this position, for me, the moving away from and coming back to myself are crucial. I recognise that writing for me is also a process of entering into dialogue, not only with myself but also with the literature. The observer stance, which allows space for me to think, is equally important as the experiential connection to the self. I am being both the active writing subject and the written object who interact with each other (Ronai, 1995) and with the literature. This brings the discussion about my relation to theory in this thesis. Instead of thinking about and interpreting research data using theory, I exercise what Jackson and Mazzei (2012, 2013) propose as using theory to think *with* data and use data to think *with* theory. Jackson and Mazzei (bid) argue that this breaks the binary between theory and research practice and show how these two constitute or make each other. It is easy to interpret writing as inquiry as reflective writing from experiential places only and exclude its engagement with theory. This view generates a separation and binary between reflective writing and analytical writing, in writing as inquiry, writing is both the process of data collection/generation and data analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), which indicates that there is no separation between theoretical analysis and reflective writing. Richardson (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:974) encourages researchers who intend to use writing as inquiry to try to produce 'seamless' text in which 'previous literature, theory, and methods are placed in textually meaningful ways rather than in disjunctive sections'. Such a 'seamless' text is what I will present in this thesis. My writing as inquiry is not merely writing in its literal way, but also a continuous circle of writing, reading, and writing with and about readings. As Bochner's (1997) endeavour in blurring the line between theory and story, my use of

writing as inquiry also disrupts the line between theoretical analysis and reflective writing.

What also strikes me about writing as inquiry is its endeavour in engaging the reader. It puts a smile of resonance on my face while I read Richardson's (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) writing about the boringness of some of the qualitative research. Both Speedy (2001) and Bondi and Fewell (2016) recognise the disconnection between counselling research and practice and that practitioners often find the research papers inaccessible or intimidating to read. In a three-day counselling and psychotherapy research conference I went to, I was shocked to see that while most of the researchers presenting in the conference were practitioners, I did not hear much from the reflexive voice of their practitioner-selves in their presentations. I was presented with a lot of numbers, categories and theories that I found difficult to understand, to take in and to relate to my practice. This experience left me wondering for a long time. If counselling and psychotherapy research could not reach the majority of counselling and psychotherapy practitioners, then what is the value of our research whose ultimate aim is to enhance counselling and psychotherapy practices?

In the other conference where I was able to bring my uncertainty, questions, doubts and shame into my presentation, audiences approached me afterwards and said that my paper made them think. I did not promise any answers, but the audiences engaged in the questions. This is the impact that I would like this thesis to have. I do not want my research to be the 'flat piece', a 'cold dinner' that is forced down (Pelias, 2011:666).

I agree wholeheartedly that '[q]ualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading' (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:960). Writing as inquiry is committed to capturing the reader's attention, to engaging them in conversation (Speedy, 2008) and reaching beyond academia (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). It 'attempts to provide sufficient substance to contribute towards scholarship in the field as well as sufficient space to engage the reader's imagination' (Speedy, 2008:139). This is what I try to do methodologically.

Writing as Elegy

[I]n that space of transition and transience, where light fades into darkness and darkness begins to shimmer with light, something of the soul is always left behind and needs to be mourned.

(Romanyshyn, 2013:30)

Given my questions about narrative and language in psychotherapy, one might argue the conflict between this and the underlying belief of writing as inquiry which is ‘language matters’ (Pelias, 2011:660). Another idea perhaps embedded in writing is to establish order: ‘[s]imply to line up words one after another upon a page is to create some order where it did not exist, to give recognisable shape to the sadness and chaos of our lives’ (Smith, 2007, cited in Pelias, 2011:660). This quote cited by Pelias, one of the pioneers in writing as inquiry, suggests that the process of writing is ordering and giving shape to our experiences. This is similar to the widely suggested and often accepted therapeutic effect of narrative and story-telling in counselling and psychotherapy. Therefore, there can be inner conflicts between what I am questioning and the methodological choice I make. This section aims at discussing these potential conflicts and my approach to them.

I would like to start with my disbelief in exactitude. Poet Louise Glück (2000, cited in Pelias, 2004:72) says there is nothing more crucial or exciting than being able to say fully and exactly about something and to get to the bottom of something. However, I resist the lure of exactitude and relinquish the attempt to reach to the bottom of the psyche. For me, a sense of loss is always located at the core of languaging or writing lived experience, which I will explore now through psychodynamic theory, especially in relation to symbolisation, the development of the third position and the unconscious.

In psychodynamic theory, the development of the capacity to symbolise is viewed as closely related to the development of the third position (Bondi, 2013). In early infancy, the child’s needs are met without language; having his/her needs accurately responded to gives the child a sense of omnipotence and mergence with the world and the mother or carer (Bondi, 2013; Winnicott, 1960). Later in the infancy development, after the external reality is experienced by the infant, the links that

connect the infant to each of the parents separately are confronted by the link between the two parents in which s/he is an excluded third (Britton, 1993). The child comes to realise that each of the parents are separate others who do not solely exist for him/her (Bondi, 2013). This position as an observer rather than a participant is the third position (Britton, 1993). Its establishment provides us the capacity for 'reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves' (Britton, 2004:48). And the achievement of the movement between immersion in lived experience and the third position brings the capacity to symbolise and reflect on our experience (Bondi, 2013).

The concept of the third position and its crucial place in the development of the capacity for symbolisation and reflexivity indicate a separateness, or to borrow Balfour's (2005:51) phrase, a 'linked separateness'. As Bondi (2013) points out, there is always a gap between the being in the experience and the reflection on or being curious about the experience without which symbolisation is not possible. Thus, there is an implicit acknowledgment in symbolisation that the experience being symbolised has gone and we are no longer at one with that experience (ibid). As Colman (2007:22) writes, 'a symbol cannot be a symbol of something unless it represents something other than itself. Therefore the thing that is symbolised must be absent from the symbol.' Language as a form of symbolisation intrinsically carries the sense of absence and loss with it.

Moving to the third position is a key developmental experience, from the psychodynamic perspective, yet at the same time, it is also 'suffused with unavoidable pain and loss' (Lanman, 2005:147). It shatters our fantasy of a world as an absolute oneness with the mother or carer in which language is not necessary. Obtaining the capacity to reflect on our experiences is to know that 'we have lost an archaic sense of one-ness with the world and with ourselves' (Bondi, 2013:15). Language entails this pain and loss.

In addition, Romanyshyn (2013) points out the complex relation between the discipline of psychology and what it studies – the soul². The difference between 'the standpoint of consciousness' and 'the reality of the unconscious' determines the

² The use of the word 'soul' in Jungian theory, on which Romanyshyn's writing is based, has its ambiguity and I interpret Romanyshyn's use of soul here as the totality of psychic world and process (Samuels et al., 1986), including the unconscious.

problem of language (Romanyshyn, 2013:26). The belief of the unconscious determines that our psychic world is always beyond the reach of language (Romanyshyn, 2013). Drawing on poet Brendan Kennelly's reflection on his struggles to write down his experience with the figure 'the man made of rain', Romanyshyn (2013:30) raises that writing down the soul might be similar to applying the language of 'the daylight view of conscious' to the things in 'the nighttime view of unconscious'. Language use in research that concerns with our psychic world is a way of 'speaking of meaning as a presence that is haunted by absence' (Romanyshyn, 2013:29). This links back to the sense of absence embedded in language, as discussed previously.

As can be seen through my discussion so far, the development of the capacity to reflect and to symbolise, and the inadequacy of language in speaking the fullness of our experiential world which includes the unconscious, entail a profound sense of loss. Thinking about this loss, I am particularly drawn to one of Romanyshyn's (2013) proposals for researchers to keep soul in mind while writing down the soul: writing as elegy. In this proposal of elegiac writing, he honours the sense of mourning for what has slipped away, what has been 'lost, forgotten, left behind, abandoned, and yet haunts our efforts to know the world and ourselves and to say what we know' (Romanyshyn, 2013:313). He sees the researcher as the 'failed poet' who 'stands in the gap between the fullness of experience and the 'failure' of language to command it', who 'is able to bear the tension between knowing and not knowing' (Romanyshyn, 2013:9-10).

There is tension between the nature of this research project, my epistemology position and the adoption of writing as inquiry. However, instead of seeing this as contradiction, I see it as elegy, a hymn of lament (Romanyshyn, 2013) for what has been lost in language. When writing what I can write, I also hold in mind what I cannot write and the mourning for it.

This sense of mourning is also brought by the ordered and linear nature of writing. I came to realise this through my struggle in writing or typing on the computer.

As I walked to the library on a morning which was to be devoted to my thesis writing, I felt a sense of reluctance. I was puzzled because I had been feeling excited about finding a research direction that felt right to me and eager to read and write.

While I attended to this feeling, what appeared on my mind was the computer screen. I imagined myself sitting in front of the computer with the Word document open, struggling to type on the blank screen. I imagined myself starting to type, feeling unsatisfied, deleting and then re-writing. Sometimes I spent a long time 'rehearsing' in my mind before I could type even just one sentence. This is an anxiety-provoking process. However, I then realised that while typing drains me, when I write with pen and paper, it is usually a lot more relieving. When I have a spark of inspiration, I have to go for pen and paper even when I have a computer right in front of me. Thus in that morning, I started to wonder (with pen and paper) what this is about, what is my trouble with writing on the computer. I had both my notebook and the word document in front of me, and then I noticed how neat the words looked on the computer screen.

The words on the screen stand one after another, neat and tidy, straight line, equal spacing. There is no trace of crossing, shifting, inserting; no trace of my process, struggle or excitement. When something is deleted, it is gone. When something is amended, it looks like it has always been how it looks like in the present time. So much is left out in the neat screen text. On searching my way to the current research focus and methodology, I hand wrote most of the materials. I wrote here and there, with all the crossing, adding and grammar and spelling mistakes. They were 'all over the place'. I wrote thoughts that crossed my mind. I copied the quotes that I love. I wrote my responses to them. They were bits and pieces. After I put them in order on the computer screen, the text can never tell this 'all over the place' and 'bits and pieces'. Sometimes I am surprised when I read the Word documents I typed previously by how ordered and logical they appear to be. When I read them, I see a person with a clear mind who knew exactly what she was doing, whereas in my memory I was not like this at all. These texts do not tell the struggles, the putting together, the adding in, the clutter and my messy writing process. There is an academic requirement for me to write in a presentable manner, to cut out the parts that do not fit. It is comforting to see my thoughts come together as a whole, and that I am making sense thus others can understand me and give feedback, which makes communication possible. However, the parts of me and my process that these neat texts cannot tell are left out and abandoned.

Just like the keyboard and computer screen leave behind the messy writing process, writing itself can leave behind the non-linear and messy aspects of the experience. This is the potential paradox in my research – to use writing, which usually is embedded with order, to discuss or question the predominance of order and coherence. I have no solution to propose for this paradox. It is another inevitable painful loss to be mourned in writing. It is writing down as well as leaving out and cutting off. Writing as elegy is also homage to this aspect of loss.

However, this failure of language does not mean that our writing in the field concerning lived experience is doomed. Pelias (2004:78) sees exactitude and closure in writing as tasks that can never be accomplished, yet he also writes, ‘it is the search that matters’. While humbly acknowledging the losses and unbridgeable gaps, many researchers have made heart-warming and valuable efforts to write down the soul, to show lived experience, to know, to convey meanings and at the same time to allow themselves to be transformed by the writing (e.g. Richardson, 1997). I am joining them in this endeavour. I write for possibility, not for promise.

Lastly, I would also like to point out that writing itself in this research project is an immersion in the inadequacy of language and narrative including what is brought as well as left out by the order and coherence in language and narrative. When I write, I am not only seeking to know, but also experiencing the failure of language. Together with sandplay which is mainly embodied and non-verbal, it offers me a glimpse into the unspeakable.

Sandplay, A Pathway to the Researched

Having discussed ontology, epistemology and methodology, I will now move to discuss in detail the research method I use to approach my research topic based on my methodological choice.

My immersion in the topic of narrative coherence started before my research project took clear form. It was present in my daily life, in my personal therapy and in my work with clients. However, when I explicitly located my research topic, I wondered how I could engage even more with it, especially with the unnarratable and unspeakable. Sandplay came to mind immediately.

Sandplay has always been one of the reasons that motivate me to undertake this research project. In each of my encounters with sandplay, it offered me something that talking therapy failed to offer. Having experience of sandplay in research and practice contexts as well as experience of few years of talking therapy as a client, I have had a sense of the differences between these two approaches especially regarding speaking and the unspeakable, and narrating and the unnarratable. Sandplay's embodied, non-verbal nature and the space it gives to silent play in which coherent narrative is not emphasised offer me a chance to fully engage with a space and time where language and narration, including the pressure of narration from myself and/or others, are absent. At the same time, the presence of a sandplay therapist can offer me a chance to talk if I wish. Therefore, it not only provides me with the experience of silence, embodiment and the non-verbal play, but also allows me the chance to try to verbally share my experience and stories if I wish. This means that I have access to what talking about the embodied, unnarrated or unspeakable is like, and what this talking can offer and fail to offer me. I see sandplay as a pathway to know or at least an attempt to know that I am researching.

For these reasons, I decided to engage with sandplay sessions as the 'sandplayer' to gain the unique experience that I would not get otherwise.

A Brief Introduction to Sandplay Therapy

Having explained my rationale for using sandplay as a medium to gain knowledge of my research topic, before moving into information about the sandplay sessions arrangement and the ethical consideration, I would like to offer a brief introduction to sandplay therapy for readers to understand my choice of method.

The Use of Terms

Since the use of sandtray and miniatures has been integrated into therapeutic practice of different theoretical orientations (Carey, 1999; Day & Day, 2012; Kosanke et al., 2016) and has been given different names by various modalities, it is necessary to firstly clarify the use of terms in this thesis.

I use the term 'sandplay therapy' in this thesis to exclusively refer to the Jungian approach to sandplay developed by Swiss Jungian Psychoanalyst Dora Kalff,

and use the term ‘sandtray therapy’ to refer to the therapeutic work involving the use of sand and miniatures in general (Carey, 1999; Day & Day, 2012).

The client’s creation on the sand is usually named by sandplay therapists as the sand picture (e.g. Ammann, 1991; Kalff, 2004). Some authors also refer to it as sand world (e.g. Rae, 2013; Zhou, 2009). I prefer to adopt the term ‘sand world’ because of the following reasons. First of all, compared to ‘sand picture’, the term ‘sand world’ better conveys the three-dimensional feature of sandplay. Moreover, as the creation on the sand is regarded as a concrete manifestation of the client’s inner state (Zhou, 2009) which contains material that is ambiguous and flowing (Ammann, 1991), the word ‘world’ emphasises the ever-changing nature of experience whereas ‘picture’ might suggest a static image. In her introduction to sandplay therapy, Kalff (1991:1) also describes the sandplay process as the client setting up ‘a world corresponding to his or her inner state’. Therefore, I find it sensible to name the client’s creation on the sand as a ‘sand world’.

Sandplay Therapy

Inspired by British child psychiatrist and paediatrician Margaret Lowenfeld’s ‘World Technique’ (Boik & Goodwin, 2000), Kalff developed her own method of working with sand and miniatures which she calls ‘Sandplay’, based on Jungian psychoanalysis (Turner, 2005). Initially, sandplay therapy was developed for therapy with children, but later it started to be used for adults. Nowadays, it is widely used for various age groups, from children (e.g. Maree et al., 2012; Nasab & Alipour, 2015), young people (e.g. Zhang et al., 2011) to older adults (e.g. Suri, 2012). It is also used for couple therapy (Albert & Paulo, 2015) and family therapy (Carey, 1994). Different forms of sandplay therapy have been utilised in various areas, including, to name a few, depression (e.g. Ammann, 1991; Maree et al., 2012), dementia (e.g. Suri, 2012), autism (e.g. Lu et al., 2010) and interpersonal issues (e.g. Zhang et al., 2011).

The Process and Material of Sandplay Therapy

As indicated by its name, sandplay therapy involves playing in the sandtray during therapy (Kalff, 1991). The sandtray is approximately 30 × 20 × 3 inches in size (Zhou, 2009), filled with sand. Sometimes, there are two trays, one with dry sand and one with wet sand (Kalff, 1991; Turner, 2017; Zhou, 2009). The interior of the sandtray

is painted blue, so that by moving the sand and revealing the blue colour below, the client is able to create symbols such as sky and water (Kalff, 1991; Turner, 2017). The sandplay therapy room usually contains a relatively large collection of miniatures. The variety of the miniatures usually include a cross-section of inanimate and animate beings that we can encounter both in external and imaginary worlds (Kalff, 1991), for example, people, animals, natural objects (stone, trees, shells, etc.), buildings and vehicles (Kalff, 1991; Zhou, 2009).

Sandplay therapy usually consists of two central stages: non-verbal play and verbal communication (Zhou, 2009). In non-verbal play, the client usually constructs a world of their own on the sandtray using miniatures (Turner, 2017; Zhou, 2009). In this stage, the therapist is silently present to witness the work (ibid). After the sand world construction, if the client would like to, the second stage of sandplay therapy involves the client verbally sharing their sand world with the therapist, usually through telling its story (Zhou, 2009).

Therapeutic Function of Non-verbal Aspects of Sandplay

As a type of expressive therapy (Kukard, 2007), sandplay therapy is non-verbal, non-rational, visual, and sensate in its nature (Donelan, 1999; Weinrib, 2012). This nature allows sandplay therapy to have its therapeutic function which is unique from other forms of psychotherapy including psychotherapy that is also based on Jungian tradition, for instance, Jungian dream analysis. The uniqueness of sandplay therapy is usually addressed in aspects including speaking the language of the unconscious and making it visible in three-dimensional form and the bodily involvement during the process.

From the perspective of Jungian therapy, image is the language of the unconscious (Weinrib, 2012). Expressive forms, for instance dreams, depict the conflicts the unconscious holds and point out the potential and direction of resolution (Donelan, 1999). It is believed that focusing on rational and directed thinking runs the risk of losing the connection to the unconscious and instinctual life (Donelan, 1999). Therefore, giving the unconscious contents and emotions visual shape is crucial in Jungian tradition (Sandner, 1991). This is indeed what sandplay offers. In sandplay therapy, through creating a scene on the sand, the unconscious contents find their

expressions in symbols (Kalff, 1991). The habitual abstract intellectual thinking is avoided (Ammann, 1991). The sand world constructed by the client allows us to ‘consciously peer into the psyche and record in some form the symbolic images we see there’ (Sandner, 1991:xii). Sandplay not only allows the unconscious to express itself but also offers opportunity for the conscious mind to interact with the unconscious. Thus, it is sometimes described as a ‘waking dream’ (Ryce-Menuhin, 2015). Ryce-Menuhin (2015:11) writes about the use of sand in sandplay and I see it as a beautiful analogy for how sandplay allows the encounter between the conscious and the unconscious, and the expansion of the conscious ego:

Sand and its use as the earth-medium in sandplay is important as *nature’s transitional material* at the depths of the seabed, bordering onto the conscious landscape as it rises from the sea. (Italics original)

The concrete visual image in the sand world carries the immediacy of experience which can be diluted by words and avoids the semantic difficulties brought by words (Weinrib, 2012). After the therapeutic hour, the materialised imagination – the sand world – is taken within by the client and continues to affect the psyche (Ammann, 1991).

Another unique feature of sandplay therapy is its physical dimension. As Aite (2007) recognises, imagination is first staged in body experience where emotional life begins to take shape. The body knows and reacts before we are consciously aware of the fact that an emotion is taking hold of us; the body has its own conscious without connection to rational thinking (Ammann, 1991). As Ammann (1991:2) writes: ‘The deeper the emotions and feelings are covered up, the more distanced from consciousness memories and a part of our personality have become, the less likely it is that we can find the words to express them.’ In sandplay therapy, the client touches the sand, makes shapes and builds a world in the sand with their own hands. This bodily engagement in sandplay allows the unconscious content of the psyche and emotions that we find difficult to verbalise to find a way of expression and communication not only in visual but also in three-dimensional form. Additionally, bodily engagement in sandplay takes the client back to ‘the time when visual imaging

predominated over verbal conceptualization' (Bradway & McCoard, 1997:71). Through this physical involvement, sandplay promotes a healing process which does not actively involve intellectual understanding (Donelan, 1999). It is believed by some sandplay therapists that the healing and transformation process promoted by sandplay may not need active involvement of intellectual understanding nor words (Ammann, 1991). This indicates that the non-verbal process of sandplay in the presence of a therapist itself is healing and therapeutic even when the intellectual understanding which can be logically put into words is absent.

Sandplay Sessions Arrangement

In the process of doing this research project, I engaged with six weeks of sandplay sessions in the presence of a therapist who is experienced in using sand and miniatures in her practice. I would like to highlight that the engagement with sandplay in this context is not therapy. The sandplay sessions were for me to gain the sandplay experience in order to engage with the realm of experience that is unspeakable or beyond narrative. I did not go into sandplay sessions as a client with the intention to work through specific issues or for self-development. I did not look for therapeutic effect from these sandplay sessions. Instead, both the therapist and I were clear at the start that these sandplay sessions were set up merely for research purposes. For this reason, I will refer to these sessions as 'sandplay sessions' in my later writings without referring them as 'sandplay therapy'.

The set-up of these sandplay sessions were identical to a sandplay therapy session. Each sandplay session was an hour long. I started with a stage of silent play with the sand and constructing a sand world using the miniatures and other materials. When I felt ready, I would verbally share my world with the therapist. Because of the non-verbal nature of sandplay, the sandplay sessions were video recorded for my reflection afterwards. I took pictures of my sand world after each session. The therapist also took pictures of each sand world I built after I left the room.

I continuously wrote, read and reflected during the time of conducting this research project as a way of inquiry. During these six weeks of sandplay, I usually wrote my reflection on the session immediately after it finished. I looked at the pictures

of my sand world and the videos of each sandplay session during the week and continued to write between the sessions. I also wrote about my experience of making sense of my sandplay experience.

After six weeks of sandplay sessions, the therapist and I met for a half an hour review session where the therapist brought the pictures she had taken of each of my sand worlds. We shared with each other how the process was for us and the sense we had made of the sandplay sessions.

Ethical Consideration

The nature of the therapist's participation in this research project is not as the research participant but the facilitator of the sandplay process. The focus of my reflecting and writing are on my own experience and my process of making sense of my experience. Therefore, I see myself as the only research participant in this research project

The therapist was informed that this process is initiated for research purposes, upon the first contact. The therapist was contracted to work within the ethical framework which her practice and training are based on. We contracted before the first session in terms of the time, payment, frequency of the sessions and confidentiality. The sandplay sessions were run as sandplay therapy sessions would in a natural therapy setting. The video recordings were only focused on the sandtray and my hands. The therapist and the therapy room were not included in the video recording nor the pictures. No identifiable information about the therapist are revealed in this thesis.

I acknowledge that in the process of sandplay, which is not therapy but could have therapeutic effect, the material that would emerge was not foreseeable regardless of my intention. Personal material related to others might come up during the sandplay, but my research would not focus on my relationship with any others. I could not control the process of sandplay, but I have made decisions regarding what to include in my thesis. I have not included any identifiable information of anyone else in my thesis.

Sandplay involves working with the unconscious and unexpected content might come up. I expected that, during the sandplay sessions, the therapist with professional capacity would be able to support me, were this to occur.

The subject that I am investigating in this research project, though coming from a personal place, is not an area that I approach emotionally for the first time nor an area that is currently overwhelmingly painful. I have been processing it in my therapy, during my training and my reflections before I located on the current research focus.

My personal therapist at that time was aware of my research plan and design. We discussed the effect of the sandplay sessions on our relationship and our work together. She continued to work with me during that process as a support in case any distress would be brought up by the sandplay sessions. At the same time, I had the support of my research supervisors during the research process. Therefore, I had the supports that I might need in place if the research project were to churn up any emotional difficulty or discomfort.

Last but not the least, I would like to acknowledge that the process of writing in this thesis can be challenging and emotional. However, as McCormack (2014) acknowledges, it at the same time helps me to process and contain the rawness of my experience, and thus it is also a way of self-care and self-support.

Having explained the sandplay arrangement and ethical consideration, I will now move on to the last section of this chapter regarding data generation, analysis and presentation.

Data Generation, Analysis and Presentation

Instead of being presented as a systematic whole sectioned by themes, my research data and analysis will be presented as a collection of writings on my research topic which, drawing on a music concept, I regard as ‘variations’ on the theme of language use and narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy. These pieces of writing will be presented in chronological order. This section of the thesis will explain my rationale for making such a decision. Meanwhile, it will also illuminate how in my research the data generation, analysis and presentation are not separable.

As made clear in a previous section, the core feature of writing as inquiry that I adopt for this research project is to allow the writing, including reflective writing and dialogue with literature, to take me to previously unknown places without assumption, expectation and design.

During the research process, I live with the research question. My thinking and reflection about the research question penetrate my personal and professional lives. As Moustakas (1990) proposes, there is immersion with the research question in my everyday life. However, this immersion is not experienced as a 'stage' of the research project as Moustakas' heuristic inquiry suggests. For me, the immersion *is* the research. This immersion determines that my research data comes from a variety of places: not only my experience and reflection of my sandplay sessions, but also my personal realisation evoked by life events, my counselling practice, my personal therapy and my thinking about relevant literature. I write about all of these, and the writing itself, which is a process of striving to know and explore, not only is the analysis but also becomes the data. The content of this thesis is also its process (Romanyshyn, 2013).

Chronologically, my writings in this thesis consist of and are presented as three parts: pre-sandplay writing, reflective writing about sandplay sessions and post-sandplay writing. There are different qualities to these writings in different stages. In the pre-sandplay stage, I engaged in reflecting on my experience in personal therapy, my personal life and professional experience, and literature reading. This stage before sandplay is the stage where words were all I had in my reflection on and thinking about my research topic. I have made a decision to include this part of writing not only because it contributes to my discussion on narrative coherence, but also because it contributes to showing my shifts and changes before and after sandplay. During the six-week period of sandplay sessions, my writing mainly focused on my experience in and after the sessions, and what was stimulated in me by the sandplay. I also wrote about my writing about the sandplay sessions. Because of the rich and intense embodied experience I gained in these weeks, I focused more on writing about myself than engaging with literature. When I produced my post-sandplay writing, I closely read my previous writings with the light of relevant literature. However, it is not correct to say that my pre-sandplay writing and writing about sandplay are the 'data' and my post-sandplay writing is the analysis. Almost each piece of writing contains

both ‘raw’ material, e.g. personal and professional experience and analytical writing. Then each of these pieces also became a source for later analysis. I see this as ‘layered account’ (Ronai, 1995) where I put myself and my writing into theories and literatures. I also call it ‘layered analysis’ where analysis also becomes data for further analysis. I would say that my earlier section about how I came into my research epistemology and methodology which talks about writing the unspeakable or unnarratable is already a piece of analytical writing on my research topic. Therefore, as for St. Pierre (1997) who feels that data collection, analysis and interpretation happen all at once in her research, it is also impossible for me to divide my research process into data generation, analysis and presentation. And this inseparability is exactly what the process of writing as inquiry would bring (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Again as for St. Pierre (1997) who found that she first identified the data, then went backward to identify the data collection method, then went forward again to think how these data produced knowledge, I also only identified the process and the methods I have used after the data generation and analysis. My data generation started as soon as I started to read and write. I have divided my writings into three parts because it gives the readers the context of my writings, shows the shifts, changes and transformations occurred to me during the research process and invites the readers to join my research journey.

Mostly my later pieces of writing were built on and inspired by my earlier pieces of writing. Because of this interrelationship between my writings, readers of my thesis would need to read one text in relation to other texts. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen to present these pieces of writing in the order they are written instead of mingling them with each other. Yet, more crucial are the following reasons.

The immersion and openness towards the process of writing determines that I wrote from the place where I was at in the time of writing. Each piece of my writing involves aspects of my life related to my research topic that stood out to me. Because of the unpredictable flow of experience and realisation that cannot be foreseen nor repeated, each of these pieces of writing has a life of their own. Each of them has a unique standpoint from which the research question is looked at and examined.

Over the process of producing these writings, I have struggled to figure out how to put all these pieces of writing into a coherent and structured whole. I have felt reluctant to start copying, pasting, cutting and re-arranging to put all the writings into one. As I see each piece of writing as having a life of their own, doing so seems to exercise an act of 'killing'.

St. Pierre (1997:179) describes the 'linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production' in research as 'ruthless'. As she writes in another paper (St. Pierre, 1995:114):

This project has transgressed its legitimate bounds into the realm of the unnamed, and the requirement of this format to represent a clear, linear process of research which can be judged as worthy becomes violent, coercive, and distortive.

While my research deconstructs the usually taken-for-granted narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy, forcing a structure onto either the process or the content of my research potentially contradicts my questioning into order and coherence.

Tamas (2009) questions the common reasonable, tidy and sequenced voice in research. She sees tidy and reasonable scholarship regarding messy experiences as 'an exercise of alienation' (Tamas, 2009:paragraph 18). What we might need to do, Tamas (2009) proposes, is to write what and how we actually feel. She describes this speaking from within (Tamas, 2009:paragraph 20) as:

If I were interested in feeling these things, I would have to write as the person I am in my lover's arms or on my therapist's couch, not in this smooth public voice. Any knowledge produced would come slowly, obliquely, and well salted with tears. My words would not strike some gong of resonance that marked them as true but they could make you feel something. [...] These sorts of stories may be difficult to defend on grant applications.

They would require us to take seriously and enact our theoretical commitment to unknowing and refusal of mastery.

My requirement for myself to produce a traditionally rigorously structured thesis comes from an inward desire to master and for certainty as well as external requirements as explained in the introduction. I needed a masterful voice, a clear and systematic structure to secure my identity as an academic.

However, the actual journey of doing this research is a journey without clear stages nor a clear destination. It is to get lost and try to find a way. It is times of confusion and sparks of realisation. It sometimes feels like stepping into a dark forest, but the philosophers, therapists and theorists whom I will draw on in later chapters come as floating lights allowing me to see the paths. The roads are never straight and I do not have a bird's eye view to see and show a clear map of the forest. What I can show is merely the paths that I have travelled.

Breaking my reflective and analytical writing into pieces then reassembling them into a certain and clear structure betray my argument against a forced coherence that includes order, closure and linearity.

Additionally, along the research journey is a process of transformation which is recognised and emphasised by researchers of writing as a method of inquiry (e.g. Richardson, 1997). As I write into my research topic drawing on my sandplay, personal and professional experiences and seek assistance from various philosophers and theorists, I become more and more aware of aspects of myself. Some of the realisations are so crucial that I regard them as transforming me as a person. This process of transformation, of travelling to different places, would be lost in the cutting and reassembling.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that Wittgenstein (1972:vii), whose work I refer to in my later writing, also speaks about his unsuccessful attempts to bring his philosophical remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* into an organised whole:

It was my intention at first to bring all this together in a book whose form I pictured differently at different times.

But the essential thing was that the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks.

After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination.

And the sentences that follow particularly touch my heart as if he is speaking for me:

– And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thoughts criss-cross in every direction. – The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings.

In addition to the individual life of each piece of writing that I refuse to break, there is also a criss-cross relation between these pieces of writing. Wittgenstein (1972:vii) talks about his work in *Philosophical Investigation* as ‘the same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made’. This is similar to my approach to my thesis. There are dominant points that I make again and again in my pieces of writing. However, each time, they are approached from different angles with insight from different philosophers or theories and my ever-changing lived experience. Sometimes the work from the same philosophers and theories are drawn into different writings but from a fresh understanding that might be built on my previous writing and reflection.

I would like to see my writings as variations on the theme of narrative and narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy. In classical music, variations of the main melody, that is the theme, ‘have an overarching form, often beginning with

the simplest and closest to the theme, then moving progressively farther and farther away from the recognisable, and concluding with a section that brings the theme forcefully and unforgettably back to mind' (Knouse, 2007:41). The progressive feature of my writings is not as clear as Knouse's description of variations in music which indicates a clear beginning and end. However, my arguments develop further and clearer as my writings progress over time. Similar points are addressed, yet my writings are not merely going around repetitive circles. Each time these points are revisited with different and unique engagement with literatures and lived experiences. I see this revisiting as an exercise of holding the research question in mind at all time.

Writing and Thinking with Theorists and Theories

I have stated in an earlier section the relation between writing and the use of theory in general in this thesis. Now, I would like to justify the use of specific theories and theorists in this thesis.

Instead of a conscious choice, the use of theories in this thesis comes from an organic place of encountering. Returning to the dark forest metaphor I have given earlier, these theories and theorists are among the various lights that I see in my journey into the dark forest. They appear like the moonlight, glittering stars or fireflies along the journey which I have encountered. In different times of this unpredictable journey, I find different theorists speaking to my experience in those particular periods or moments, and I want to engage in dialogue with them, which often helps me to make sense of my experience. In my inquiry in this research project, I often need to treat myself in the way I would treat my clients in therapy. In my work with my clients, each week I greet them without certain expectation and wait for whatever they would bring. Sometimes the same materials are brought in week after week and it could feel like we are running a futile circle or moving forward in a spiral. Sometimes clients come with a different perspective they gain on what was previously mentioned. Sometimes they come in with totally new materials that have never been brought up before. I follow and accompany them to where they need to go. Most of the time, neither of us know where that place would be. As a practitioner trained in the dialogue between person-centred and psychodynamic approaches, I often gain help from great thinkers and therapists from these two approaches. However, I also turn to transactional analysis, emotion-focused therapy and existential therapy theories when

I find particular parts of these approaches help me to think about and understand a particular client. In my research, I need to give myself space to be where I need to be without limiting myself theoretically or experientially. In different periods of my experiential journey, I seek dialogue with theorists that I not only theoretically but also emotionally relate to the most. For example, when I struggled with explaining myself and noticed the obligation that comes with the role as a client, I found Judith Butler's critique on giving an account of oneself and Foucault's disciplinary power helped me to think. When I encountered my childhood trauma and found myself engaged in imaginary dialogue with an imaginary other, I thought about the theory of the dialogical self. While I looked back at my experience in therapy where talking and narrating felt unnecessary, Winnicott's concept of being alone in the presence of another and the unintegrated state came to my mind. Later, reading Freud's and Leader's writing on melancholia enlightened again my understanding of some of my experience that I have written previously. However, this research is not merely roaming around purposelessly. The research focus is always held in mind. Perhaps my drawing on Wittgenstein is the most peculiar of all. Just as his writings are always presented as philosophical remarks instead of an organised whole, I find that I meet his thinking here and there like encountering sparks of flashing lights in the journey.

Having reviewed relevant literature in narrative coherence and explained my onto-epistemological position and methodological approach, the following three chapters are my writings into the inquiry about narrative coherence/incoherence.

In the two pieces of pre-sandplay writing in the next chapter, reflecting on my daily experience and my experience as a client and therapist, I will think about and challenge the concept of narrative coherence, drawing on Judith Butler and existentialism. In Chapter 5, I will present my writing during the process of six weeks sandplay sessions. I will present my more 'immediate' sandplay writings in italic. They are excerpts of my thoughts, feelings and a short story I wrote soon after the sessions. I will present the writings that I find most relevant to my thinking about my research topic. In Chapter 6, I will return to my pre-sandplay and sandplay writing with reference to Butler, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Winnicott, the dialogical self theory and theories about melancholia as discussed by Freud and Leader to make sense of my experience with regard to narrative coherence.

To stay consistent with my refusal to force structure onto what lacks a certain shape, I deliberately present my writings as they flow without imposing on them beginnings and closures, introductions and conclusions. As my readers, you might appreciate it or you might be left feeling uncomfortable by its unstructured-ness. I invite you to pay attention to and reflect on your reactions. I would like to see your reaction to this as a part of the unwritten work of this thesis.

Chapter 4 Pre-Sandplay Writing

Piece 1, March 2018

There was a session in my personal therapy when I did not want to talk at all. I sat there holding a soft toy from the therapy room and felt myself traveling all the way back to a fantasised childhood early sunny afternoon. Wearing my shorts, I lay on my bed holding my soft toy. The bamboo mat under my body took away the afternoon heat. I was asleep yet awake at the same time. I was aware of my surroundings. I knew it was sunny, it was just after noon, and I was on my bed. I knew my mum was somewhere around, so I was perhaps by myself on the bed but I was not alone.

My mind was in this state, this asleep yet awake state where comfortably retreated into myself yet somehow connected with another. I did not need to talk. In there, any words would feel awkward – they would not only be awkward but also would be breaking something. I tried to explain to my therapist this image that I immersed myself into at that moment, but each time I talked, it pulled me away from the immersion like scratching an old stubborn sticker off a cardboard. I struggled to narrate this moment to my therapist just as I struggled to narrate this struggle. Every word came out from my mouth yet they felt as alien as if they were from outer space. I started to feel anxious sitting in front of my therapist not wanting to say anything, though she did not push me to speak. I explained how I felt but then the explanation felt inadequate.

I really did not want to talk or I really could not talk at that specific moment. Sometimes I am tired of words which at those times only serve to tear my experience apart. In times like this, my therapist encouraged me several times to talk in my mother tongue. As much as I appreciate her effort to help, I did not think that she understood my occasional struggle with and resistance to words, which is not about the inadequacy of my English. It is about talking itself.

The ‘scratch off’ and ‘tear apart’ I mentioned above would perhaps remind you

of the connection between the ‘third position’ and language I wrote about in the last chapter. The development of language and the capacity to narrate not only relates to the separation from the other(s) but also from oneself. To tell a story about what we have experienced is to have ‘a reflexive grasp on it’ which entails a distance (Frank, 2013:97). As Tamas (2009) acknowledges when she writes about researching our own lived experiences, we cannot observe our experiences and be inside ourselves at the same time without splitting of some sort. Frank (2013) describes the person living in lived chaos as imprisoned and there is no distance from this experience. As for me, I wonder whether each of us at some time of our lives, not only in chaotic moments or periods but also in daily life and perhaps in therapy, are gently ‘imprisoned’. Here by ‘imprisoned’, I mean not as constrained or tamed, but as being inside our immediate experience without distance. This can be as troubling as experience of illness or can be as gentle and warm as my daydream of laying on a bamboo mat on a sunny afternoon in the therapy room.

It makes me think about how legitimate the question we as therapists often ask our clients is: ‘how do you feel now?’ The client is encouraged to attend to their immediate feelings at the present moment. If symbolisation requires the capacity of reflection in retrospection, then how could one be present with the experience and at the same time talk about it without splitting? We are separated from that experience in order to talk about it; if we are completely at one with it, we are not able to talk about it. The ‘talking’ can function therapeutically as bringing the client in contact with the ‘reality’ in some contexts as the capacity to be reflexive is crucial. However, at other times, perhaps it takes the client further away from their experience to serve the need of the other – the other’s need to understand, to listen, to be in contact, to be the other in a dyad. This brings me to what Butler (2005) says about our ‘obligation to others’ and the relational dimension of language as well as the formation of our being. Unlike the third position theory, Butler brings forward Laplanche’s suggestion that instead of moving from the world of one to the world of others and moving beyond narcissism, the problem for the infant is to build an ego starting from too much otherness. The speech of the adult world, to the infant, is impingement and is overwhelming. While the child tries to tell a story of their own, there is a story already at work in them. The infant is unable to tell the ‘I’ and ‘you’ which inhabits and

dispossesses the infant's desire from the outset, which contributes to the opacity of self-knowing that cannot be articulated. Butler (ibid) points out here the limits of self-knowing and self-telling. If the process of psychotherapy is a 'literary affair' (Lieblich et al., 2004:4), together with the separation and splitting innate in language as I discussed, does psychotherapy also entail a separation from lived experience which is paradoxically in contrast with the 'in-contact-ness' that it always promotes?

My experience in the therapy room as if I was laying on bed, by myself yet not alone, might be an experience of 'holding', a concept introduced by Winnicott (1965b), in the quality of the therapeutic relationship. In a holding environment which protects the client from external impingement, the client, like the new born baby, is able to gradually develop a continuity of existence of their own rather than developing a false self that reacts to external impingements (Winnicott, 1965b). As Butler (2005:59) writes 'there are expressive dimensions of that 'holding' that cannot be described through narrative means'. Describing it pulled me away from the contact with that holding and from the wholeness, including the indescribable dimension of that holding.

As I did in my therapy as described, many clients *explain* themselves, their thoughts, feelings and events, to the therapist in therapy. As Frank (2013:107) argues, the act of 'explaining' imposes a purpose on behaviour. This, for me, resonates with Nietzsche's philosophy about how we become reflective and positioned to give an account of our actions, as explained by Butler (2005). Nietzsche argues that we become conscious of ourselves in the face of suffering and punishment. After someone suffers as a consequence, the sufferer or their advocate seeks to find the cause of the suffering for a just punishment of the one responsible and we are asked whether we might be that cause. This question entails a causal agency and responsibility of the self. Due to this query, we start to give an account, offering an 'I', to own up to the cause of suffering or define ourselves against it. Thus it is in the face of the other, of the query for causal effect and responsibility that we start to narrate ourselves (Butler, 2005).

Focusing on the therapeutic setting, it seems to me that this query is what often happens on the interpersonal and intrapersonal level. Psychotherapy is originated from Freudian psychoanalysis which tries to bring light to the unconscious and find the childhood origin of the psychological suffering. This implicitly entails a cause or a reason and that something can be solved once the cause of the suffering is found. The

clients were and are encouraged to tell their stories, record their childhood memories (mainly in psychodynamic approach), and make links (or make sense of the links made by their therapists). Intrapersonally, the client usually strives to find the cause of the suffering and failing to do so always increases the suffering. As Butler (2005) argues, 'a narrative that responds to allegation must [...] accept the possibility that the self has causal agency, even if [...] the self may not have been the cause of the suffering in question'. Sequence and causality thus are embedded in these therapy narratives. To quote Frank: 'Narrative is fundamentally an ordering of people, material objects, and maybe imaginary beings, depicting them as acting upon each other in various ways. Stories enable us to order the confusion to find what is narratively causal, that this kind of thing happens in consequence of this other thing' (in Neile, 2013:268).

As Tamas (2009) points out, there is comfort in seeing ourselves as coherent, knowledgeable and safe. Though she mainly refers to the field of research, this can be extended beyond research to everyday life. Both Tamas (2009) and Frank (2013) recognise that there seems to be a usually unspoken expectation and desire for traumatic and chaotic experience to make sense. Not doing so somehow indicates inadequacy and failure (Tamas, 2009). Again, I extend this to everyday life. Not making sense and not giving a coherent narrative which demands sequence and causality somehow indicates a sense of inadequacy.

My therapist told me that our two years therapy together needed to come to an end. Since then, it has been difficult to be in therapy with her. There has been such pain in this process of walking to the ending. I can give only one violent analogy of the process towards separation – it is like boning the flesh. I do not understand this intolerable pain. Approaching the termination of therapy perhaps has pressed a crucial button. I do not know where it comes from. I know that I had early separation with my parents which in no doubt contributes to my current feelings. However, this pain does not feel like only an enactment of this past life event. It feels like as if it dwells in me, as if it is innate in me.

I have always been told to trust the process and tolerate the uncertainty, which implicitly implies a sense of (positive) movement as a result. According to Gendlin's (1995) theory of focusing, if we slow down, attend to our felt-sense and wait,

symbolisation and relief will come. However, I thought in the midst and mist of my pain, ‘what if I would never understand or make sense of it, what if I would never know what this rush of pain comes from?’

Some believe that psychotherapy is a process of bringing integration and coherence to a chaotic life through developing a coherence narrative ((Lieblich et al., 2004). Yet, writing about Nietzsche, Butler (2005:13) reminds us that ‘life entails a certain amount of suffering and injury that cannot be fully accounted for through recourse to the subject as a causal agent’. As Frank (2013:112) points out, ‘modernity has a hard time accepting, even provisionally, that life sometimes is horrible’. People listening to the chaos narrative that has no narrative order often deny this horror that can only be faced but never be solved, and the fact that sometimes there are no way out from it (Frank, 2013).

In response to my struggle to understand and make sense, my therapist appreciated my self-awareness and spoke with a hope about waiting to see where the current understanding and continuous exploration would take us. This has also been what I sometimes tell my clients. However, as a client and a therapist, I hold this question, ‘what if I will never know’. What if life, not the life in trauma or illness that Tamas (2009) and Frank (2013) talk about, but the life that each of us lives, is illogical and chaotic in nature. We explore the unconscious in therapy room but we do not surrender to the unknown. There is, I think, an implicit hope or belief that the unknown will somehow become some kind of known, that the unknown is knowable. It brings a sense of horror when I think of surrendering to the thought that ‘I will never know’, and this chaos, illogicality and disorder of life. The depressing darkness this brings almost threatens my existence. I wonder about the ‘let’s see where it would take us’ comment my therapist made to me and which I made to my client, and my therapist’s encouragement to me regarding talking in my mother tongue when I found talking difficult. Are they attempts to escape this horror and threat? Is the emphasis on narrative coherence an act of escape and denial?

With this thinking, I found particular resonance in Butler’s (2005:65) writing:

In the language that articulates opposition to a non-narrativizable beginning resides the fear that the absence of narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life, and

will pose the risk [...] of a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence.

However, she goes on to explain this as a necessary death of ‘a fantasy of impossible mastery’ and a ‘necessary grief’ (ibid). To say the self must be ‘narrated’ is to say we cannot survive with the unconscious (ibid), or perhaps survive the unconscious.

Surprisingly, I find that after the initial threat, the acknowledgement of the possible innate horror, suffering and injury of life that cannot be attributed to the causal agency of self nor be put into narrative form brings me a relief. It takes away to some extent the sense of ‘failure’ and shame in the struggle of making sense and articulation. Indeed, as Butler (2005) argues, to hold oneself accountable for one’s life in narrative forms (with a suspect coherence) requires a ‘falsification’ of that life. I think of my clients who become apologetic, frustrated and ashamed for the inability to make sense and articulate. I wonder whether tolerating incoherence and relinquishing coherence in the sense of sequence, order and causality would bring relief in therapy room also.

Piece 2, April 2018

In his book *Real Mysteries: Narrative and the Unknowable*, Abbott (2013) cites a short story by J.G. Ballard called *The Drowned Giant* for his discussion about the literal representation of the 'unknown'. The story begins with a handsome drowned giant being washed up on the shore after a storm. The curious crowd, after initially hesitating, touch him, climb on his body, blow in the caverns of his nostrils, and examine his hands and skin. Everyone has an explanation for or idea about his origin and how he got here. However, where he comes from and how he came into being are entirely inexplicable. The story ends with the 'trivializing of this wonderful being, of origin unknown' (Abbott, 2013:48). People's interest in him fades as time goes by, and he is merely remembered as, if remembered at all, a large sea beast.

For me, the image of this giant speaks about the unknowability of our internal and external worlds and how it might be forgotten in our pursuit for knowing and explanation.

Approaching the end of my personal therapy has confronted me with this large giant which can both be wonderful and threatening to my very existence. I was so deeply sad that I could not stop crying in one session. I have always known that endings and separation are difficult for me. I have looked at my childhood, talked through the major separation from my parents in my childhood, examined my attachment to significant others. I have become aware of my role as a sibling abortion survivor. I have striven to understand the path I have taken over these years. I have processed the significant events that I used to trivialise. I thought I had reached some understanding after a few years of personal therapy by now, but I do not understand. Perhaps the approaching ending of therapy acts as the storm. It washed up this giant onto the shore of my awareness. It was upon touching this giant at this time that I realised it has always been in the sea of my inner world but I was too scared to look at it. Instead of the image of a drowned giant, a black hole is an analogy closer to how it feels like if I have to describe it in some way. I have always lived life earnestly and hardly feel world-weary. I engage in various activities. I pursue and I form relationships with people. I would like to think I live a meaningful life with purpose. It was not until I confronted this black hole in the ending process of my therapy that I realised what I

had been avoiding thinking about.

The black hole confronted me with the fact that life can lack inherent meaning and purpose, in spite of the striving for them, and we are alone in facing our worlds, internal and external. And ultimately, we are alone in facing death (Jacobsen, 2007).

I cannot describe the intensity of emotion I felt then. I was deeply sad, lonely (even in the room with a therapist), horrified, astonished and panicky.

I do not understand where it comes from. I cannot give a reason why it is there. What I do know – I knew it the moment I was in touch with it – is that it exceeds my childhood experience and my relationship with and separation from my parents. It feels much bigger than childhood origin, attachment, or separation anxiety. It asks questions about my existence. The black hole does not come from any theoretical reading, but was deeply felt. I call it the black hole because, again for no clear reason, I knew almost without any doubt that it is not some kind of wound or trauma. It is the life that I live. It cannot be ‘healed’ or cured. Actually, it does not ask for cure.

Bruner (2002) holds the view that one of the core aspects of stories is that something runs awry, otherwise, there would not be anything to tell about. He goes on to point out that ‘the story concerns efforts to cope or come to terms with the breach [in the expected state of things] and its consequences’ (Bruner, 2002:17). This can almost be viewed as an implicit script for counselling and psychotherapy. The client comes to therapy because something goes or feels ‘wrong’. They tell their stories about it, with expectation to make sense of the feeling of ‘wrongness’, and then cope or come to terms with it. The ending of this script is either the success or failure in ‘coming to terms with’ or ‘making sense of’.

We are deeply influenced by the discourse available to us or the pre-given stories (Frank, 2010; Mattingly, 1998). The widely used ‘healer’ metaphor of therapist implies a story that the wounded goes to the healer then leaves feeling better in some way to some extent. This script of counselling and psychotherapy becomes the ‘unchosen choice’ (Bourdieu, 2000, cited in Frank, 2010:25) acting as template for therapy experience. The client comes to therapy to talk, to tell their stories which, as Frank (2010) puts it, not only gives information but also gives form – coherence, meaning, intention and orientation. Interpersonal approaches, as Mitchell (1993) argues, always involve questions and inquiries about what happened, who did what to

whom and when, as if there is a definite sequence that can be told. Stierlin (1963) describes us human beings as the heir to the law of causality. Order, coherence and continuity indeed are what we are deeply concerned with and even our sense of self rest on them (Mattingly, 1998). These are what narrative and stories entail.

However, life lacks form (Frank, 2010; Mink, 1987). Existentialism particularly catches my attention regarding this topic after my experience described above. Opposite to the view that life possesses meaning which gives definite answer to the troubling questions of our existence, existentialists claim that life is absurd (Wartenberg, 2008). In existentialism, absurdity specifically refers to the contrary of reason (ibid). Some existentialists believe that the crucial ontological fact about human beings is that we inherently ask things to make sense and the world to be rational (ibid). Yet, from the existentialism's point of view, the world is neither rational nor irrational; it exists in its own way without regard to anything. Because of the absurdity of life, our desire to seek meaning, reasons and purpose is doomed to failure (ibid). Therefore our anguish comes: 'we long for meaning conveyed by a universe that cares but discover only an empty sky' (Flynn, 2006:47). In terms of our experiential world, we desire the same reasonableness, meaning and order. We would love to experience our lives as 'personal, generally coherent, emotionally meaningful, narratively knowable, and tellable' (Richardson, 1997:62). We would love to 'see ourselves as conscious, creative guarantors of meaning' (Tamas, 2011:64). Yet, this deep human concern of order and coherence is not in accord with our experiences of life, as some anthropologists argue (Mattingly, 1998). When we capture our formless life experiences with ordered and coherent narrative, we are also taming our experiences (ibid). To quote Mattingly (1998:34), who elaborates on some narrative theories that doubt the structure of lived experience and narrative have much to do with each other: 'Narrative [...] is a mythical imposition of coherence on what is otherwise formless experience'.

I struggled when I wrote about what I call the black hole above. I gave it a name so it is easier to communicate it to you as my audience. Yet, writing and telling about it, in spite of the amendments and caution in choosing the 'right' words, I feel that I have failed it. I almost thought I offended it for that I have misrepresented it in my words. The only moment that I could be truthful to it was the moment when I cried

for it, when it resided in my heart. I wrote about the black hole on the same day when I regained some distance from it – it was only then that I could write about it. However, though the sadness it brought crept in, I could not grasp it bodily anymore. Words felt pale. Any words and sentences I could think of feel small compared to how the black hold felt to me at that moment. Any writing about it inevitably involves trying to explain it to you, my audience, yet I do not know how to ‘leave intact the experience of unknowing’ (Abbott, 2013:43) while using the language of known and how to produce understanding for the inapprehensible.

This failure of my representation find resonance in Meister Eckhart’s (cited in Abbott, 2013:27) writing about the ‘expressive impossibility’:

And if He is neither goodness nor being nor truth. What is He then? He is nothing. He is neither this or that. Any thought you might still have of what He might be – He is not such at all.

Although Meister Eckhart is talking about God here, it well expresses my inability in capturing the black hole. Every way that I have to describe it, it is not that at all. Tracing the origin of the words ‘narrative’, ‘narration’, ‘to narrate’, and so on, White (1980) points out that they derive via the Latin *gnārus* which means ‘knowing’, ‘acquainted with’, ‘expert’, ‘skillful’, ect., and *narrō* which means ‘related’, ‘tell’ from the Sanskrit root *gnā* which means ‘know’. This very idea of ‘knowing’ in the root of narrative, narration and the act of narrating is in contrast to this impossibility of expression. As Butler (2005:63) argues, the requirement for narrative coherence might foreclose the acceptance of ‘the limits of knowability in oneself and others’.

Turning to existentialism’s view on the absurdity of life, I propose that too much emphasis on narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy allies with the human concern and desire for meaning, coherence, order and reason, but alienates the innate absurdity of life. Thus, insisting on coherence can cause people anguish and shame. This is what Tamas (2009) describes in her traumatic experience. She says that it is not that we are broken or lost that brings despair, but the impression that everyone else is not. There is a dominant view that behind the chaotic or fragmented narrative is ‘sickness’ and ‘inability’ needing healing. However, it can also be, as Sahlins (1985,

cited in Mattingly, 1998) mentions, that the experience of self lacks coherence and is in nature fragmented; continuity itself is an 'illusion'. Butler (2005) calls it an ethical violence to demand of ourselves and others complete coherence: this demands the manifestation and maintenance of self-identity at all times which is impossible to satisfy in a temporal horizon.

On an existential level, Butler (2005:79) raises that when little space is given to the self-unknowingness and the non-narrativisable self, the livability of the person relies on their narrativisability:

The postulation of the non-narrativizable poses a threat to such a subject, indeed, can pose the threat of death [...] [I]t can take this form under situation of moral duress: If I am not able to give an account of some of my actions, then I would rather die, because I cannot find myself as the author of these actions, and I cannot explain myself to those my actions may have hurt [...] Perhaps death would be better than to continue to live with this inability to render myself ethical through an account that not only explains what I do but allows me to assume greater agency in deciding what to do.

Experientially recognising the absurdity of life allows me to revisit my comment on myself as 'a person without stories to tell'. I realised that it is about not knowing how to tell. The senses of loneliness and melancholy have always pervaded my emotional life. I never understood them despite searching. The most significant anguish it brings was in my therapy. I never knew how to talk about them because I could not give causes, reasons or satisfactory interpretation about them. I wished I had something more concrete to tell, to share with the therapist, to complain about, like 'normal' people. I had always thought that it was because of my insecurity and self-reliance that I could not open myself to people around me. This is true to some extent, but it is not all. There are people that I truly trust. I could not talk about this with them because I really do not know how. The inability to talk about my sadness, loneliness and melancholy, especially in therapy, left me feeling deeply ashamed. I thought I was

ill in some way or just was making a fuss. Sometimes, I even wished that I could have a label such as 'depression', as if it could make how I feel legitimate. There is a tendency in us human beings to believe that whatever receives a name has a being of itself and an existence of its own (Mitchell, 1993). In my case, I hoped a 'thing' such as 'depression' could offer a reason. My attempts in therapy to find reasons, to make sense, to talk about it logically did not take me anywhere but feeling ashamed. Finally giving space to the absurdity of life and the incoherence of experience brought relief.

When I talked about the black hole, the ultimate aloneness of life and the inevitable death, my therapist reminded me that we could make life meaningful in spite of death. I am not against the searching for meaning. The black hole does not at all tell me not to live. What I do not agree with is the attempt to shy away from the important, though threatening at first, existential question I was confronted with by bringing up the 'ought-to-be' meaningfulness. This implies that what I experienced could be 'healed'. Tillich (1960:10) might say that my therapist at that moment was trying to remove or treat my basic anxiety – anxiety about 'being bound to the law of coming from nothing and going to nothing', whereas the anxiety of having to die, of becoming guilty and of lacking a meaning in life is not removable or answerable by the therapist.

If I tap into the sadness, melancholy and loneliness I feel in my life, it is about life. Counselling and psychotherapy are concerned with empathy and 'being with'. One aspect of the power of therapy is breaking the isolation one might feel through being understood by another. Talking serves as a tool to achieve this. However, I think that the aloneness of life is easily kept at bay as it threatens the basic striving of our profession – being with another in their world. It is hard for us as counsellors and psychotherapists to think that 'each of us is alone in our experience of our world' (Jacobsen, 2007:50) and that what is experienced by one is inaccessible to others (Mattingly, 1998). To quote Gabriel Marcel (cited in Flynn, 2006:24), 'no two beings, and no two situations, are really commensurable with each other: to become aware of this fact is to undergo a sort of crisis'. Indeed, to envisage this brings to me crisis personally and professionally. In spite of the company of friends, family and therapy which has brought connection, care and love, I am confronted with the fact that I am alone in my experience of the world. As the example Jacobsen (2007) gives about a cancer patient who feels alone in spite of the surrounding kindness and care, we often

find ourselves stand alone in crucial moments. We therapists talk because we want to understand, to enter the client's inner world. However, language as a communication tool to achieve understanding and empathy inevitably fails to bring the togetherness that we would like to think we can achieve. This takes me to a session with one of my clients.

In a session with this client, I found that I could only respond 'I don't know what to say'. This is a client who actively engages in getting help. However, deep inside he knows that he is trying to get 'better' and talk about the 'depression' for the sake of others, because he knows deep down that there is a place where no one can enter or help. Every talk he gives about this place is an 'edited version' of this place. The client refers to it as depression but it is not as knowable and clear as this. People around him encourage him to talk about it and expect that he would feel better afterwards. However, he often finds himself being in a place beyond communication. I felt helpless sitting with him, perhaps because I could not enter that exact place neither. I was trying to grasp something that he felt impossible to communicate, and at the same time, I had to communicate my limited understanding through limiting words. I was deeply touched and tearful. Yet, I struggled to find words for empathic response. I thought any descriptive words would be just as taming as the label 'depression' for something that is much more profound. It is not a response that I am satisfied with, but the only thing I could say at that moment was 'I don't know what to say'. I deeply felt the failure of language. At the same time, I respected the aloneness that others cannot 'cure' for him.

Despite knowing that this place of aloneness cannot be shared through communication, this client still talks. He said he talked from a place of obligation. Perhaps he talked from a place of obligation when he was in the room with me too.

To tell a story of oneself is an action towards and requires another (Butler, 2005). An account of oneself is always given to another (ibid). I wonder in this case whether to some extent narrative coherence serves for the therapist rather than the client. The client gives accounts, tells stories of themselves, narrating what is narratable and cutting off, as Butler (2005:21) would say, 'a necessary opacity in our understanding of ourselves'. Being in the client's chair, did my client feel obligated to impose a narrative form that his experience does not possess (Mink, 1987)?

As a client, I perhaps have felt obligated to my therapist. When my personal therapy was approaching an end, I tried to find an alternative to therapy. Writing was what I could think of. I tried to write a 'life story' of my own, but what I wrote was not temporally and causally organised into a sequence (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). It does not possess the temporal ordering that Baerger & McAdams (1999) propose as a primary device that establishes coherent narrative. Instead of linear stories, I wrote fragments of events and experience. What I produced was more like beads in a bowl than on a string. It was in this process of writing that I realised the pervasive aloneness I have been feeling since I was a child. However, when I imagined talking to my therapist about what I had written, I had a sense of annoyance and I thought I would not have reached the same place if I were not writing but talking. It is often believed that coherent narrative needs to be meaningful (e.g. Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). My annoyance came from this meaning making and it strongly connects to the need to make sense *for the therapist* as my audience. I took it as my responsibility to articulate myself in order to allow my therapist to understand me. And I could not shake this responsibility off me. Writing alone allowed me not to make sense. It allowed me to be 'meaningless'. Only the paper listened. It remembered but did not push, respond or get confused. By the end, nothing might make sense, yet I felt at ease. It did not bring me as much shame. I could not be as messy as I was with my pen and paper in the therapy room.

Chapter 5 Writing about Sandplay

Piece 1, May 2018

Sandplay Session 2 The World Beyond Reach



Figure 1 The World beyond Reach

It is a world beyond my reach. It exists before and after time. The word 'ancient' is not enough to describe it. It exists before me, and will exist after me. It is right there in front of me, but it is far away beyond the horizon. It is there, just be.

I find myself holding on to the edge of the sand tray. Yet, I know I have to let it go.



Figure 2 The Elf with Green Hair

The elf with weird green hair stands in the corner. I feel protective of him, but I know, I need to let him go. More importantly, I know now he is okay. Innocent and genuine, always with good will, I thought he was not aware of the danger of 'our world'. He opens his arms; he invites and accepts. I thought that he was not prepared for what would come along, that he just did not understand. Seeing him in this world that is beyond my reach, I realise it has always been me who feared, who worried and was vigilant for him. I ought to protect him I thought. Seeing him in this world in front of and far away from me, I understand that he does not feel insecure. Yes, he is innocent but he is not as vulnerable as I thought. Perhaps, it is time to open my arms too, to let go and to welcome. My little weirdly green-haired elf brother is okay.

I know I want to be there in this world that is so far away from me yet somehow so close to my heart. Its dry woods, which I think have the quality of stone, strong, firm, calm, and gentle, give me comfort. It calms me down. Imagining myself in this world, I can run between those woods; I can take a rest leaning on them. They would be just

there, being there for me. Perhaps not actually for me. I wonder, whether they care, whether I matter. Or am I too small as a human-being to them as what exist beyond time. Perhaps, it is not that they do not care. It is that they do not have the concept of our man-made linear time. No quick, nor slow, they just be.

They are calm, as if nothing can disturb the calmness. Is it the father I always long for? Calm and gentle, grounded and patient, not easily anxious. This is the father I need in my times of distress and happiness. The elf brother of mine (or perhaps it is the ideal baby me) is there with dad. The elf feels secure, calm, light, and supported, and he knows that he would be able to stand on his own feet. He can. He is strong. Now I can let him go, knowing he is in this world, the world which I want to go but do not belong.

I asked for a parent in my personal therapy. I said that I just wanted to be a child for a little while. My therapist told me that I needed to parent my inner child myself. I know it is true. However, it hurts to ask again and again for a parent to lean on just to be told that is not possible. I did not know how to separate this adult me and child me. At those moments, it was the whole of me wanting a parent and to abandon all the responsibilities. The adult me is tired and wants to be looked after too. I felt hopeless. If I could not long for what I long for even in personal therapy, there was nowhere I could turn to for what I deeply want. Am I just being unreasonable?

At this moment, I understand, this sand world beyond reach is being there for me as what I have been asking for, the parent that I would not get elsewhere. The shapeable nature of the sand and the world in sand make it capable of being what I desire it to be, without defences or rejection, but just be.

I am deeply attached to this world, though I know I don't belong. I know that I can't go there, otherwise I'd not want to come back.

I tried to speak to this world, to the elf. However, I have a sense that this world and everything in it speak a different language from mine. They have a different sense of time. The world is not in the past, not in the future and is not merely in the present. It is none of them and it is all of them. It is beyond reach in this sense too. The man-

made concept of linear time cannot catch it. Isn't the concept of time another of our ways of gaining control?

There are only a few things that I can understand about this world. I don't know why I choose any of these figures and objects, why they are in certain places, why there is a fruit in the corner. At the same time, I don't feel I need to know. There are no stories in it in terms of when, where, who does what, and before, then, after. This world and everything in it just exist, being there. While I hardly understand anything about it logically, I know it in my heart and body.

My sandplay experience makes me realise the paradoxical feelings of wanting to tell about myself and to be known on one hand, and wanting to refrain from this telling and explaining due to the frustration of the doomed effort of telling.

There was a need to share, a need to be known. I wanted to tell the therapist how I felt and what I thought in my sandplay. I wanted to know what she thought about my sand world and how it made her feel. At the same time, paradoxically, in the telling between us, there was a sense of intrusion. When we looked at my sand world and talked about it or my relation to it, both of us became the observers of my sand world. The therapist offered comments that inspired me. For example, she mentioned how this world I built brought the word 'ancient' to her which made me realise the central element of 'time' in the world. However, the therapist's comments and my communication with the therapist were a 'third' standing between the sand world and me. It pulled me away from my immersion in the world.

It takes effort to be known. I stepped out from my exclusive attachment with the world, and tried to describe in a language shared by my therapist and me what does not speak the same language. The therapist tried to understand, never perfectly, this world through my imperfect translation. This imperfection is the price I pay for my need to be known which perhaps can never be fully met. In this sense, the effort to be known, that is to not be alone, paradoxically confronts me with the fact that I am alone in this never perfectly translated world.

I was able to make sense and share what I wrote above to some extent during the session. However, the majority of it only came out in my writing. The freedom to roam on paper without the otherness of the therapist and the need to 'translate' allowed me to connect. This reminds me of my personal therapy session where I connected with the black hole, I was with the therapist but I was also alone in the connection with the black hole. I think the therapist's presence is crucial. I would not have connected to the black hole certainly, perhaps also this world beyond reach, without the presence of a therapist. Nonetheless, in those profound moments I was alone, and I could only be alone.

Despite this, it is the effort from both the therapist and me, though bringing frustration at times, that matters.

As a therapist myself, I do not think that I can completely be in the client's shoes, taking each step as they do. The need for language, for talking to each other is a proof that we are not absolutely at one with another. There is a need for this medium to bond us together. We strive to know and to be known, while the fully knowing and being known is doomed to failure. Yet, it is not to say therapy is doomed to failure. The striving delivers a message 'I care'. I see this as sitting at the core of therapy.

I worked with a client who found it difficult to articulate his wants and needs. In the initial session, he could not articulate what went 'wrong' and what brought him to counselling. It was difficult for him to believe that anyone cares about him. A message that I explicitly and implicitly let him know again and again during our work together is that I care, not only because it is my job to listen, but also because I care about him as a person. We only had a limited time to work together. Near the end of our work, the client started to take better physical care of himself. He found it a little bit easier to 'give others a chance', to start to trust. However, he could not articulate what exactly allowed the changes to happen. He had not developed from 'inability' to articulate to articulation. He felt better yet could not articulate how different it was and what made it different. However, is the articulation necessary? Could it be enough to be content with the transformation without knowing why? I am reminded of my own development throughout my training, of how I felt different as a person yet could not fully explain it. What is the articulation for? Always searching for logic and

explanation, naming what has happened and how it happened give us a sense of control. Being clearer about the needs being met could help us take care of these needs better in the future. Thus, knowing gives us a sense of control towards the future. However, as in this client's and my own experience, I question that we can fully know. In the later stage of my work with this client, he said that he struggled to believe that others would care, when he himself could not make himself logically understandable to others. If I had pushed him to articulate either his 'problems' in the beginning or his development near the end, it could be contradictory to the message that I want to convey to him: I care. I care about him including the unarticulated and unarticulatable aspects. I try to understand, despite knowing there is so much that could not be communicated and that my understanding can only be partial. Though, there will always be a paradox in that I care and strive to understand the unarticulatable which in itself requires converting the unarticulatable into (incomplete) articulation. What matters is the space I give to the unarticulated and that I do not see articulation as a necessary indication of therapeutic change nor the goal of therapy.

The transformation and therapeutic changes which have no words and do not need words (Ammann, 1991) are what bring my appreciation to sandplay. My own experience of sandplay freed me from logic. In this beyond-logic-world on the sand, I do not have to explain myself. I said lots of 'I don't know' during the sessions and did not feel ashamed by it. Instead, I laughed with playfulness. I did not tell any stories with sequences, but talked about my feelings towards some parts of my sand world. Not having to know brought contentment. It seemed to enable me to relinquish legitimising my feelings.

I have known the black hole for years, not cognitively, but bodily. I was frightened without clearly knowing it. I feared that once I got closer, I would get suck into it. Perhaps, this was the reason why I could not look straight at it previously. My body knew it well long before my cognitive mind. My body finds its language when touching the sand. This is perhaps why sand always attracts me. My body is heard by the sand where logic and explanation are not needed. The sand listens but does not interpret. Being with another person when I encountered the black hold and built my sand world seemed to be important. I seemed to come to realise some aspects of my being when I was seen by the therapists. However, this otherness of the therapists can

also be frightening as intrusion. In my sandplay, at times, especially in the beginning when I played with the sand, I found it difficult to be under the therapist's gaze. Although the sand is also an 'other', it is completely receptive. It does not ask anything from me and does not give anything to me. It is formless and shapeless. Yet, my hands can give it shape and form. When I touched the sand, I felt as if the unspeakable finds a way to speak and find another who can listen without translation.

A blue plastic sensory bin is filled with a layer of light-colored sand. Various colorful plastic toys representing sea life are scattered throughout. In the top left, there are pieces of green and blue coral. A yellow toy crab is near the top center. A blue toy fish is on the left. A yellow toy starfish is in the center. A red toy starfish is on the right. A green toy turtle is on the right. A purple toy starfish is at the bottom right. Several other fish toys in various colors (blue, yellow, grey, black) are scattered across the sand. There are also some small white and yellow toys that look like jellyfish or small fish. The bin is placed on a wooden surface.

This is a story about the yellow fish. In the deep sea, the yellow fish and her families and friends live together. This day, they are heading to a party. The yellow fish and her mum and dad lead the way, and her friends follow. Even the turtle who is never a party animal joins in. Even the strangers whom nobody knows join in. This is kind of a big day, because it is a farewell party. The little yellow fish has a talent. Yes, as a fish, she can fly. This is the day she sets off to the far away mountain. No map or compass, any idea of how far it might be, and no fear, she looks forward to the future. She wants to fly to the mountain and knows that she will get here. In the farewell party, they all dance with the music and swim through the colour-changing seaweed. To say goodbye today means that no one knows when they will see the little yellow fish again. If she misses home, how could she come back to see her families and friends? What if she gets lost? Farewell is sad, but they turn it into a celebration. Everyone dances,

sings and laughs. There are no tears. The yellow fish is of course sad to leave home and everyone at home behind. She will miss them very much. However, this does not stop her from looking forward to the world above. She does not think about her possible homesickness and she is not worried about what she could do then. She knows that she will have a new life and make new friends on her way to the mountain. In the music and laughter, with the best wishes from friends and families, the yellow fish swims up towards the open air and will soon fly towards the sky where future awaits, heading to the far away mountain of her dream.

The real story is not as neat. I have left out things that do not fit into the story and are at odds with the general mood of the story. I felt scared when I put down the three crabs on the upper right corner. They reminded me of spiders. They seem to trap and forcefully occupy the starfish. I do not know how they relate to the rest of the sand world. In the lower right corner stands the seahorse who is not joining in the festive atmosphere. Instead, he is just looking at all of these at a distance.

I also twisted certain aspects of the sand world to create this story with a coherent storyline and general mood. The sharks on the left hand side of the tray were not friendly in the beginning. I remember looking at them and thought that they would do something bad. There was something evil in them. This feeling towards them turned when I looked at parts of the tray more closely while I was sharing with the therapist. These sharks also became part of the group of friends. The men with swimming suits were strangers to the sea. They came to search for some treasure that they were commanded to look for. I do not know what they were searching for, who is their commander. They have no connection to the yellow fish and her friends and family. And they do not care about what is going on around them as all they are ‘programmed’ to do is treasure hunting. The blue whale on the left-hand-side of the yellow fish is not simply one of the parents. It is the ‘ideal dad’ the yellow fish wants. His existence is difficult to describe. He is materialised and he was there in the party rather than just an ideal image or fantasy. At the same time, he is not real. There is no interaction between him and others including the yellow fish.

That the yellow fish sets off to the mountain saying goodbye to her family and friends was the main theme of this sandplay. When I thought about telling about this sand world, this story was the foreground focus. When I wrote this story, all the other feelings and facts I described above were present, but it felt impossible to include them all if I wanted to tell it as a story. I can try to talk about everything including the horror brought by the crabs, the indifference of those men in swimming suits, the shifting identities of the sharks, and the blue whale whose existence is difficult to describe. However, then what I would be telling about is this sand world full of complexity and contradiction, but not a story. As Mink (1987) points out, we implicitly recognise in the recounting of a 'coherent narrative' what is relevant and irrelevant. When I was telling this story, I was holding the criteria of relevance in mind. It stopped me from telling everything. I thought that if I did not cut off and edit some parts of the sand world, the storyline, and the consistency and logic of the story would be constantly interrupted. Thus, the story would somehow be a broken one. For me as the story teller, it had felt disturbing to tell all the bits and pieces of the sand world and how they made me feel, and at the same time hold on to the process of telling a 'story'. I wanted the story to be presentable and readable to readers. Therefore, the story presented has become a simplified one.

If the sand world is an externalised and materialised inner world of ours, telling a coherent story of our inner world, according to my experience of telling a story of this sand world, would also include a process of editing and excluding. The increased sense of coherence does not necessarily mean that different elements of the inner world are coming together to service a main storyline better, it might only mean that the storyteller is better at selecting and editing in their storytelling, or perhaps is just merely more willing to do so. This selection and edition include distortion and exclusion. It includes distorting what does not fit into what fits better, even if it is not how it actually feels. For instance, I refer to the blue whale as one of the yellow fish's parents instead of calling it the 'ideal dad' to avoid further explanation that would take me and the audiences off the track of the main story. It includes exclusion of what are at odds, for instance, the men with swimming suits, the crabs and the seahorse. While narrative coherence is highly thought of, coherence in this occasion can be seen as alienating parts of our inner world in order to fulfil how a story is expected to be.

When I put the objects down on the sand, I did not have in mind a storyline, any characters or relationships between different objects. I simply put them down according to whether it felt right to me. I shared most of the parts of the tray with the therapist. I told her about how the sharks, the crab, the yellow fish, the blue whale made me feel. My feelings towards some of the characters changed during the telling. The sharks became friendlier when I looked at them more closely and when I talked about them. I dialogued with the yellow fish and asked where they were heading to. It was then I had an answer from her that she was going to the mountain and she could fly. The storyline emerged during my verbal sharing with the therapist. I also started to feel connected to the yellow fish and realised she is me. I started to see how I also left home, family, friends, left the 'water' that I was living in, and flew to another country – the far away mountain – by myself.

While I was telling the story to the therapist, I blamed the yellow fish for being naïve and selfish. I blamed her for not being considerate enough before she sets off: how is she going to come back to visit her family and friends if she misses them; if she does come back, would all her previous journey to the mountain be in vain; how does she know the direction? She is not only lacking consideration but is also naïve to believe that things will just work out and that she will eventually get to the mountain that she knows nothing about. This blame shifted when the therapist said she envied this yellow fish. It was then I realised something precious about the naivety of the yellow fish. As much as I blamed it, I also wanted to protect this part of her. I wanted it not to be contaminated by the requirement from the rational world which perhaps means the 'grown-up' world. I wanted her to be carefree and go after what she wants, to go into the world, to be adventurous. I was able later to appreciate the courage and optimism she has to embrace the unknown future.

When I walked to the opposite side of the tray and saw the sand world from a different angle, the scene completely changed. The yellow fish did not look naïve anymore. She looked grown-up. Ironically, now she has lost the naivety which I was very harsh on and became what I wanted her to be, I missed this naivety of her. I

judged and pushed this part of her so much, but when it was gone, I wanted her back badly.

While sometimes the talking and sharing with the therapist got in the way of my connection with the sand and my sand world, I noticed this time talking facilitated the development of a storyline. In telling the story, it helped me to make connections and make sense. I also realised that this sand world, compared to all the others, is the one which I feel I can talk about the most with another person. Knowing its connection to my personal life, my place in the sand world, and how it speaks about my life makes me want to share it with the therapist. I did not talk about my own life and its connection to the sand world during this session, but when I wrote about this session, I was excited that I had a little story of myself to tell and I wanted to tell it to the therapist. I wanted to tell the therapist how I had dreamt a life far away from the place in which I was living when I was a teenage girl, how a twenty-hour train ride took me to Beijing, and how later I flew all the way to another part of the world. I wanted to tell her how many people I have met and lost, how many goodbyes I have said, and my struggle of feeling selfish doing what I am doing.

It makes me feel good that I can have this story to tell, a story with a main theme, a linear timeline, a 'once-upon-a-time'. Indeed, there is a sense of coherence. This brings a desire to talk about it, believing that it is worth being listened to. I am confident that it is a story that makes sense, even has a dreamy quality to it that people would probably like: a girl from a small city with a dream of going out to see the world makes efforts to make her dream come true. This script has desire to be told and be heard. There is no shame. There is a sense of completion, order, and 'sanity', which undeniably feels good.

When there is a story, it wants to be told and heard. The problem is to force what is not a story to fit in the shape of a story resulting in alienation and distortion.

Sandplay Session 6 The Abandoned World



Figure 4 The Abandoned World

Compared to the eagerness to tell a story in session three, session six was extremely difficult to write. When I tried to write about this session after it finished, I felt there was not much to write about. I felt stuck, which frustrated me. I felt the need to write for the sake of my research project. It took me a couple of days to think about it and try to write more about it, but the difficulty remained.

Reading my reflections of other sessions, I realised where the difficulty came from. There is no storyline and no main characters in this session. It is a world of abandoned shells. They have been forgotten for a very long time. Each of them seems to lack a history or story. Why have they been forgotten? Were they ever remembered? Who abandoned them? There are no answers to these questions. There is no relationship between each of the shells. Each of the objects, the shells, the glass stones, the dry bark, they are all just being there without reasons and interaction. This world seems to exist in another dimension of time, different from our tick-tock time. When

there is a story, when there is something happening, it wants to be told and heard. However, a world like this struggles in even needing to be told. In other worlds, though most of the other sand worlds also lack storylines, there are usually some main characters that evoke feelings in me that I can write about. I do not have strong feelings towards any part of this world, in comparison to other sessions. There is a sense of detachment this time, which makes my experience with this world difficult to describe.

How I feel about this world interestingly changes over time. The first time was when I looked at it from the opposite angle. It somehow gave me a sense of hope. As time went on and as I looked at the pictures of this world again and again, I realised I started to appreciate the beauty of this world. While there was a sense of not good enough no matter how I arranged the coloured glass stones, they looked just right later when I looked at the pictures. Not only the glass stones, but also the shells and everything else, they seem just right.

Sandplay Session 4 and 5 The Scarred Shell

Touching the Sand

My sadness and loneliness that are usually unspeakable are told by my hands.

I touch the sand, immerse in the touching. At times, random thoughts cross my mind. At times, my mind is just empty, as if it falls into sleep awake. The sand is not waiting for me to tell it what is going on in my mind. It is not even watching me. It is simply being there. It does not wait. Waiting implies that something will happen. The sand does not wait. It is being there, no expectations, nor desire to know. I touch it, smooth its surface, bury my hands and watch each grain of the sand run through my fingers. The sand follows me, but it is not manipulated. It is willing to go where I go, in the way I want. At the same time, I also have a sense that I follow the sand, as it runs through my fingers and moves according to my hand movements.

My mind sometimes runs busy, sometimes stands still, moves and stops, without rhythm. From nowhere, my sadness comes. I cannot tell whether it raises from my chest then goes through my hands which tell it to the sand, or it raises from my hands then finally reaches my heart. What I know is that I feel it there in my heart. Unlike most of the other times, it is allowed this time by the sand and by me. Its irrationality, lack of causal explanation, its coming from nowhere and going perhaps nowhere are all allowed. The sand is not confused and does not ask why. It just receives and accepts. There is nothing from the sand that I feel obligated to.

It does not feel like it reaches out to me. It does not offer extended arms. It is being receptive but without being destroyed, intimidated, or scared by my feelings. It allows, receives, and accepts. Isn't it also what we want to offer in therapy?

I finally feel like a child, not being and not needing to be rational, just feeling what I feel, no matter if it is sadness coming from nowhere or stubbornness. Putting objects on the sandtray and creating something, especially under the gaze of the therapist, sometimes bring me the feeling of obligation to share it later with the therapist. Although I am comfortable to say 'I don't know why', there is a process or a need to make sense. In comparison, the touching, just spending time with the sand, is completely free from words and rationality. There is a sense of intimacy that I share with the sand. Most of the time, I do not share it verbally with the therapist.

The video of myself touching and playing with the sand also shows me this intimacy. Watching my hands on the sand gives me a sense of togetherness. Although my hands and the sand are different in almost every respect, somehow watching the video does not give me a sense of 'otherness'. From the video I also see how they follow each other.

I made prints on the sand with my fingertips, then erased them. I made prints again and erased them again. There is something comforting about being able to make prints freely and erase them easily if I want. Yes, we can change what we say as well, but the difference is that once it is said, it cannot be undone. I can modify it, but I can never erase it from someone else's mind. Whereas sand listens but it also lets go.

The in-oneness and otherness often penetrate my writing about sand and my relationship with sand. I write about the feeling of being in one with the sand and being immersed in the touching of sand. At the same time, the sand is always the other, the other who is being there, grounded, who allows, receives, listens, and accepts. The sense of having another indicates the sense of separation which seems to be opposite to the in-oneness. And I seem to need both. I need to feel the sand as another who listens and yet also need to feel in one with it. I imagine the sand and I as two streams of flow, meeting each other, speaking the same language in the silence. We can be separated but can also be immersed as one like currents joining into the sea.

The World with the Scarred Shell



Figure 5 *The World with the Scarred Shell 1*

This world seems like a return of the World beyond Reach that appeared in session two. This time it gives me peace and warmth. The loneliness of mine is accompanied. However, it does not mean that the loneliness is gone. The loneliness is accompanied but it is still itself. There is a paradox here: how can loneliness still be when it is truly accompanied? However, it is how I feel and it is the most therapeutic part for me. Winnicott's (1965b) concept of 'being alone in the presence of another' says about how one can experience their inner world in the environment another creates but without intrusion. In comparison to this concept which emphasises being with oneself, what I experience is about being with another – this world of sand – without needing to change.

This is what the world of sand teaches me as a therapist. Receive, allow, and accept, even when things do not make sense to us as the listener or audience. It needs to be accepted that not everything can be healed or developed into what suits our logical understanding. As Baggini (2018:8) reminds us, sometimes a philosophical approach to problems of living that does not offer treatment nor cures is needed, as ‘[l]ife is difficult and full of problems, and there is no cure for living’.



Figure 6 The Scarred Shell

I had been avoiding this scarred shell for few weeks until this session. I like to put down shells in my sand worlds, but I never used this one. I almost feel disgusted by it. I could not bear to see its scars which are unrecoverable and irremovable. After some rearrangement, I have found its place in this tray. Surrounded by the bark, it

finds its safe place. It feels like having a warm sand bath. The scar will never recover nor vanish, but it is protected and taken care of.



Figure 7 The World with the Scarred Shell 2

I initially put the scarred shell on the right-hand side. Something else was put on the spot surrendered by the drywoods. But it somehow doesn't feel right. I took it away and left this spot free. Afterwards while I was talking about the scarred shell, I tried to move it to this spot and it gave me a sense of 'it is just right'. I felt a sense of comfort and relief when I found this place for it.

There is no logic or explanation at all about this scarred shell, yet I know that it has a crucial connection to me and my inner world. I do not have any ideas about where the scars come from, how the shell is wounded. I did not have any plan of where it should go on the tray. I did not have any ideas that the spot that I left free would be the safe space for the shell. And the shell feels safe and comfortable though knowing that the wound would never recover and the scars would never vanish. I wonder how this can happen in talking therapy too? Again, the client who felt a lot better by the

end of therapy but did not know how and why comes to my mind. Even though research gives importance to the positive impact of being able to tell the therapeutic story (Adler et al., 2007), there are therapeutic effect that happens without logic and storyline. It might be as random as how my scarred shell finds its place. And against the recovery story, therapeutic effect can happen without the wound being 'healed' or 'cured'. Not only the client's experience but also the therapeutic experience can be without or beyond logic and explanation.



Figure 8 My 5th Sand World

The shell showed up again in the fifth session.

This is the first time I could bear to let the scars on the shell face upward. The shell knows its wound and scar well. It also accepts that the scars will always be there. However, it cannot be alone. It needs protection and wants to be taken care of. There are so many things nearby wanting to help – feathers, wood sticks, bark, stones, but nothing feels enough. I struggle so much to make it right but my effort always fail. I change the positioning of things, especially the feather, numerous times – on two sides, in a circle, one next to or behind another – but it always feels too close, or too far away, covering too much or too little. I place the feathers up like a screen around the shell, but it makes the shell unable to see the world. The shell wants protection but also wants to breathe and see the world. I rearrange it, but then the shape the feathers are forming do not look good enough. I realise that the shell is not in pain but it feels exposed. It seems nothing can help even though everything wants to help with good will. It is near the end of the session and I still cannot find a right way. I am anxious and almost panicked when time is almost up. I am also surprised by how much I am affected by this shell and how important it is to find a place that feels right and safe for it.



Figure 9 The Scarred Shell

I reach out to the therapist for help. There is little she can do but she notices the fruit I placed on the upper left corner which has appeared a few times in my sand worlds. I put it next to the shell. And by the end I finally find a way to protect the shell with feathers on top without completely covering it.

The shell is vulnerable and fragile, and it is also brave and honest. It is so fragile that it needs something that has to be just right, that cannot be even just a little bit more or less. What a horrible world it is when you desperately need something or someone because you are so afraid, but you do not know what it is that you are looking for, what it is that you need. As a result, even if there is help offered, you are still alone and scared. Perhaps there is even anger towards the help offered which cannot meet the needs that are unspeakable. This is perhaps how we sometimes sadly miss each other.

Compared to the actual act of putting the fruit near the shell, what matters more to me is simply the fact that the therapist sees my worlds and remembers. Neither of us know what the fruit and the shell represent. And I do not think that I require her to know. It matters to me that the therapist makes the suggestion rather than letting me struggle alone. What touches and warms me is that she tries to offer and in the offering is the fact that she sees and remembers.

Chapter 6 Post-Sandplay Writing:

Piece 1, June 2018

The theme of 'self and other' has emerged from both my pre-sandplay writing and my writing about my sandplay sessions. I addressed the black hole that I have gotten in touch with as an 'other': I tried to describe it in words and felt as if I offended it because of my inadequate description of it. I experienced sand as an other who silently and acceptingly listened to me and with whom I could sometimes feel immersed as one. The sandplay therapist and my personal therapist were others I mentioned in my writing. Even when I wrote alone, I sometimes held my potential audiences in mind, whether it was my supervisors, examiners or future readers of my thesis. Interestingly, when I did not think of other people, I regarded the paper as someone who was listening, as I wrote on the second paper prior to the sandplay: '*Only the paper listened*'.

This shows the innate relational dimension of language. As Butler (2005) points out, an account of oneself is always given to an other. Entering into a communicative environment, a child is firstly addressed by others, which introduces the child into language, then the child in turn learns certain ways of addressing (ibid). I have mentioned this in my previous writings. Here, I would like to emphasise the connection between this relational dimension of language and Wittgenstein's (1972) notion of 'language game'.

For Wittgenstein, the use of language is rule-governed and is strongly connected to the community or context in which we are living. Like playing a game, we learn the set rules when we speak language. Also as in a game, we would not be able to participate if we do not follow the rules. As Lynch (1997) articulates, in Wittgenstein's understanding, language is an outward journey for one to relate to the words and metaphors of their culture. What becomes apparent here is the relational dimension of language. A primary reason for following the rule of language game is to be involved with, to connect to and to be understood by others.

This relational dimension of language can be demonstrated in the act of naming. As Wittgenstein (1972) points out, children are brought up and trained to ask 'what is it called'. Names are given after the question then we address the thing using the new name. We give things names so we can talk about them or we can refer to them in our talks. Therefore, naming and language in general serve the need for communication.

Imagine that we create a unique new word for an experience, if we want people to understand it, as Wittgenstein (*ibid*) argues, we have to do so by means of the existing language system and words. Instead of referring inwardly to what is experienced, we search outwardly to find an acceptable and understandable description or label in the community in which we live for what is experienced inwardly. The description is not correspondent to what is experienced but it is about striving to get as close to the experience as possible on the premise of being understandable. Playing the language game means to understand the language (Arsith, 2011) and be understood. In other words, it is to learn and work with certain rules embedded with the language spoken so that a level of communication can be achieved in a certain context.

The relational dimension of language bears a sense of obligation. The obligation is to make ourselves understandable, to provide good enough conditions for the listener of our speech to understand us. I see narrative coherence as embedded with this obligation. As McAdams (2006) argues, audiences of a narrative usually have certain structural expectations including, for example, causality, temporality, goal, intention or a sense of closure which allow them to make sense of the narrative. Consequently, a narrative that fails to meet these expectations may strike audiences as incoherent (McAdams, 2006). What is incoherent is usually difficult for audiences to follow and understand. In our daily life, the obligation of various authors and tellers to their audiences are obvious: news, novels, films or theatre offer audiences stories that they can follow so that audiences remain in the audience position. In comparison, the obligation of clients to be coherent in their dialogue with their therapists is much subtler to identify.

A challenge in my personal therapy was that I did not know how to tell my uncomfortable feelings to the therapist in a more understandable way. This bothered me and made me feel inadequate as a client. I remember few years ago when I apologised to a previous therapist of mine: 'I am sorry that I am not providing you

enough material to work with'. As a narrator, to see the audience confused can be a difficult experience. There was a client who apologised to me when she thought she was not making sense. 'You looked so confused', she said. And her apologetic face and voice stuck with me. Both my client and I took on our obligation as the client to provide materials that help our therapists to do their job which is to help us (to help ourselves). To make our narrative coherent assists the therapist to work – whether it is to empathically understand us, to offer interpretations, to challenge us, or to use other interventions.

I see the sense of obligation mentioned above as a manifestation of Foucault's (1977) disciplinary power in the therapeutic unit. 'Discipline', for Foucault (1977:215), is 'a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology'. Disciplinary power has the characteristic of gradual invasion, as Foucault (1977:170) argues, 'discipline 'makes' individuals'. Disciplinary power is subtle and modest, yet it penetrates into every small element, altering mechanism and imposing procedure. It is a network of relations from top to bottom as well as from bottom to top; 'it 'holds' the whole together' (Foucault, 1977:177). Here, we can look at the therapeutic relationship under the light of Foucault's disciplinary power.

Tracing back to the time of Freud, Freudian patients came to the doctor disclosing their dreams, fantasies and free associations to enable the doctor to psychoanalyse. There are certain inevitable and necessary behaviours and expectations of behaviours that bind the therapeutic unit together. Certain obligations are embedded in the actions and behaviours of both parties in order for the therapeutic function to work. What is presumed in the therapeutic relationship is that being in the therapist's chair is to listen, to understand, and being in the client's chair is to talk and to be understood. As a seeker of help, clients ought to tell their therapists what bring them into the therapy room, through which their therapists could arrive at some level of understanding and offer help.

Imagine a client who seeks help from a therapist but could not tell why, the therapist might help the client to articulate how s/he feels, what might have happened, what s/he expects from counselling, etc. Some therapists might also encourage the client to offer information about his history. These are the common questions that

therapists usually ask from their clients. Mostly it is hoped that throughout the course of psychotherapy, the client achieves a higher level of narrative coherence or be able to tell a story of their own, which they are not doing in the beginning of the therapy. Here, what is outside of the regularity – the unknown, inarticulate, incoherent, or unorganised – is encouraged to reshape itself to fit the regularity – making sense, articulated, coherent, or organised.

In his analysis of the birth of the asylum, Foucault (1967) points out with the appearance of asylum, external constraint and punishment are replaced by internal ones. Physical punishment, constraint, or isolation turn into an internal gaze of oneself. A madman is made morally responsible for any disturbance he might cause. Instead of punishing the madman's guilt, the system of asylum organises it as a consciousness of himself; it intervenes the madman's existence (Foucault, 1967:247):

[...] the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the Others; and, from the acknowledgment of his status as object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason.

This internalised moral responsibility, for Foucault, is violent. Returning to the therapeutic relationship, in the emphasis on narrative coherence, doesn't this violence also exist? Think about my apologies to my therapist and my client's apologies to me when our narratives failed to make sense, weren't we also subjecting ourselves to this internal gaze? Didn't we also feel responsible and guilty for the disturbances we may have caused to the therapeutic process? Doesn't the striving to turn to narrative coherence resemble the returning to reason? Looking in this light, narrative incoherence might have been somehow treated as some sort of madness that is out of regularity. The pursuit of narrative coherence might be stemming from discipline and relational power than merely for the good of helping clients.

When the collective assumptions about how a story is supposed to be like is not met, the story told might not be recognised as a story at all (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). Canonical model of story not only makes narrative recognisable as stories but

is also intuitively satisfying (ibid). When I wrote the story about the yellow fish, I was turning a gaze on myself in terms of what constitutes a coherent story that is easy to read and comprehend. I told a story that fits what a 'story' requires. This was to satisfy the potential audiences as well as myself who is also an audience placing an internal eye on myself. In the emphasis on a coherent story as a manifestation of well-being and therapeutic change, could therapists also fall into this implicit desire for a satisfying story, driven by intuitive longing for satisfaction? Yet, what is unique about therapy is to hear what cannot be heard even by the client themselves. Based on this belief, it is exactly what does not fit into the canonical model of story, what is thus often unrecognisable, edited, and cut off, that needs to be heard.

In my previous writings, I often mentioned a sense of relief that talking therapy fails to bring me when I write or play. In my second pre-sandplay writing, I imagined talking to my therapist and I thought I needed to make sense *for* the therapist, and '*I could not be as messy as I was with my pen and paper in the therapy room*'. In comparison, when I wrote, '*[o]nly the paper listened. It remembered but did not push, respond, or get confused*'.

Playing with the sand, I often experienced the sand as someone who '*listens but does not interpret*', who '*is not confused and does not ask why*', who '*just receives and accepts*' and '*[t]here is nothing from the sand that I feel obligated to*'.

These writing reveal that it was the relinquishment of the obligation to the therapist that I have often felt bringing me relief. This being free, at least to some extent, from obligation then brought me a sense of immersion in my inner world, which also brought contentment. Butler (2005:64) writes against the ethical violence in requiring someone to offer a coherent narrative account of oneself, and says that 'if violence is the act by which a subject seeks to reinstall its mastery and unity, then nonviolence may well follow from living the persistent challenge to egoic mastery that our obligation to others induce and require'. For me, challenging the requirement for narrative coherence is challenging this egotic mastery brought by the obligation to others.

One of the reasons that draws me to this research project is the anguish brought by having to articulate my development over the course of my training, especially my personal development. My sense of contentment was invaded by the requirement for

articulation which was never satisfactorily met and was experienced by me as being for others rather than for myself. This relates me to one of Wittgenstein's (1972) aphorisms which asks us to imagine an encounter with someone who states that for him understanding, for instance, knowing how to play chess, is an inner process. When we want to know whether he can play chess, what we would do is to draw his attention to the criteria which demonstrates his capacity even he says the knowing for him is an inner process. As Wittgenstein (1972:181) writes, '[e]ven if someone had a particular capacity only when, and only as long as, he had a particular feeling, the feeling would not be the capacity'. So, you have to be able to tell, to convince, in order to demonstrate your capacity, this is for others to know rather than the individual. This induces me to think about the justification and explanation that we often need to do for our inner states.

My practice in a university setting requires me to write reports for student clients' mitigating circumstances. I once had a client who had been feeling anxious since she was a child. The level of anxiety had reached to a point where it disabled her from attending lectures and studying. After the first session, she told me that what she got the most from our session was that she could feel how she felt without having to justify it. What she had been fearing was having to explain what made her feel this way because she did not know. Not having an answer to this made her feel that her feelings were invalid. Ironically, while the client regarded not having to justify her feelings as the most important in our sessions, I had to justify it when I wrote the mitigating circumstances report for her. The report would not be 'convincing' enough if I just wrote down how she felt. There is a need for more details, e.g. what had happened that was out of the client's control to cause the difficulty. I wanted to protect the space for the client where she could just own her feelings without justifying them, at the same time, I felt helpless facing the system that asks for justification.

In addition, looking from the light of Wittgenstein's philosophy on language, participating in language game indicates a sense of discipline. Following the rule of the language game keeps us as an insider of the community. Just as in the short story I previously mentioned titled, '*The Drowned Giant*', although intrigued by it initially, people gradually lost interest in what they could not understand and could not know. The unknowable is forgotten and abandoned eventually.

As in my experience of my sandplay sessions, in spite of the frustration, I had the desire to share with the therapist what was happening in my sandplay and to be known. Perhaps, the fear of being forgotten and abandoned drives us to shape our experiences into a knowable and understandable form. As Arsith (2011:15) says, 'learning and use of a language of a community can be undertaken as linguistic conformity, generated by the need for people to communicate and feel protected by the possibility of being understood by their peers'. Therefore, apart from being an obligation to others, coherent thus understandable narrative also stems from our desire to be known and related, even at the price of distortion of individual experience. Again as Arsith (2011:15) writes in the same paper, language:

[...] classified things for us, it allows us to label the individual experiences as generalities that we reach ultimately to manage them socially. In this process, which is the individual, it is necessarily suppressed. But this is the price that must be paid for social security.

Piece 2, July 2018

Weeks after I completed my sandplay sessions, an event led me to reconnect to a childhood trauma that I had for long not recognised as a major trauma in my life. Although I had always known it rationally, I somehow was not able to access it experientially. I did not recognise its major impact on my life even after speaking about it in my personal therapy previously. Being able to recognise it as a trauma now allows me to connect to the scarred shell that appeared in my sandplay. While I saw the scarred shell as an 'it' then, I now see it as 'me'. Now, I can see and own these scars as mine. The scar shell is wounded and frightened, so is my body. The scarred shell struggles to feel safe. The protection and help offered never feel right or adequate. At the time when the childhood trauma happened, I was not protected as a child and did not know where to seek help. Just like the scarred shell, the wounded child within me wants to hide.

When I first recognised what happened in my childhood as a traumatic experience, I was by myself reflecting on the specific event that reconnected me with the trauma. My realisation started with this sentence in my head 'my body was hurt'. Then I went on: 'it wanted to be close to people, but it was so scared...' Naturally, without clear intention, I started to engage in an imaginary telling to a person whom was involved in the event that led to my realisation. My realisation and recognition of the trauma unfolded in the telling. For the first time, I listened closely to and really cried for my hurt body. At the same time, in the midst of the intense realisation that inevitably brought pain, the imaginary telling became a therapeutic means for me.

Initially, I had felt a strong longing to tell this person and be known by him. I rehearsed in my mind what I wanted to tell him. In my imagination, I told him about how my body felt, how it was not heard by me and how it had been affecting my way of being with others. In the telling, I processed these at the same time, which then allowed me to understand and accept them. When I saw this person in reality, for various reasons, I did not tell him anything that I rehearsed in my mind. However, in the following few weeks, I continued to engage in my imaginary telling. I told him again and again about myself. I imagined that I shared the picture of the scarred shell with him and told him about the scars of mine. I had ended my personal therapy prior

to this event. However, unexpectedly, this imaginary telling had become a substitute for personal therapy. Surprisingly, after few weeks of these repetitive imaginary telling, when I was offered a place in a counselling agency which I contacted when I first started to process the trauma, I did not feel the need to talk with a therapist anymore.

I was by myself in this process in reality. Perhaps I needed to be alone. However, there is no doubt that I needed to tell someone. I use the word 'telling' here because I notice that it was never an imaginative dialogue between two parties. I imagined the content of my speech and the physical environment in which the telling was taking place, but little about this person's response, at least verbal response. What was important to me was the act of telling and perhaps being received by the imaginary other. Maybe I did not want, or even rejected, a response.

This experience of imaginary telling reminds me of my sandplay. In my sandplay, I often saw touching the sand as a kind of telling: telling that does not need words. The sand is simply being there. As I wrote at the time, '*[I]t does not feel like it reaches out to me. It does not offer extended arms. It is being receptive but without being destroyed, intimidated, or scared by my feelings. It allows, receives, and accepts*'.

This telling to an imaginary other easily draws connection to the theory of the dialogical self which sees the self as a dialogical narrator with others *in* the self-structure (Hermans et al., 1992). Bakhtin's polyphonic novel is one of the central notions from which the theory of the dialogical self is developed (Angus & McLeod, 2004b; Hermans et al., 1992). A central characteristic of polyphonic novel, as discussed in Bakhtin's (1984) examination of Dostoevsky's novel, is the plurality of independent voices and consciousness that each has its own world and are unmerged with each other in the unity of the event. In other words, there is no single author or narrator in a single objective world, but multiple voices with their own independent views. Similarly, in the theory of the dialogical self, self is regarded as not a unified one, but a 'society of mind' (Hermans, 2002; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004). It is argued in the dialogical self that *I* can move between multiple even opposite positions (Hermans, 2002). These *I*-positions are relatively autonomous and each of them has their own stories to tell regarding their experience from their own stances (Hermans, 2002; Hermans, 2004). These different voices interact with each other and engage in a process of questioning and answering, agreeing and disagreeing (Hermans, 2002). And

these voices are qualitatively different (Hermans, 2004). As often described in literature about the dialogical self (Hermans, 2002; Hermans, 2004; Hermans et al., 1992), these voices are similar to characters in a story who exchange information about their respective *Mes*, which results in a complex self.

One of the central notions in the dialogical self is addressivity (Hermans, 2011). Hermans (2011) suggests that as in external dialogue with real people, different selves address each other in their interchange with each other. They talk *with* each other. Different *Is*, as subject, talk and respond to each other from their own positions; they talk about themselves which is the *Mes*, as object. These interchanges, as external conversation with others in daily life, can change the selves' view on themselves (Hermans, 2011).

For me, addressivity is at the centre of my processing of the childhood trauma. There was a need to tell someone about it. Imaginarily telling it to a person served me therapeutically. However, instead of talking *with*, which indicates a two-way dialogue, I talked *to* the person in imagination about my realisation. It is suggested that in the telling of their stories, the client also listens to their stories through the therapist's empathic reflections (Angus & McLeod, 2004b). I think that for me, in the telling, I was also listening to myself and my wound again and again, but not through the response of another but simply through the telling. Therefore, instead of a dialogue, what I needed seemed to be a monologue that was received or witnessed by another. This also happened in my reflection of my sandplay sessions. After some of the sandplay sessions, I wrote letters that were addressed to some of the figures in my sand world, for example the elf with green hair and the scarred shell. However, most of the time I did not have imaginary two-way conversations with them. This leads me to think about my experience beyond my sandplay. There were times I rehearsed in my head something I would like to say to my therapist, but when I actually said it out loud, it felt different from my monological 'rehearsal'. Most of the time, the actual speech did not feel satisfactory. Interestingly and similarly, I have mentioned in my previous writing that I found it therapeutic to write about myself and when I wrote, '*only the paper listened*', but I had a sense of annoyance when I imagined telling it to my therapist. In my monological telling, I told an imaginary other about myself in the way I needed – I might say something repeatedly, disregard the chronological order, or

restart and reorganise my telling at any point. In the telling to a person in reality, I need to take the audience into consideration and I often amend my telling according to their reaction and response.

Considering the obligations to others in language and narrative that I have discussed previously, I seem to want to break free from this obligation not only in interpersonal communication but also in intrapersonal imagination.

In the theory of the dialogical self, self is seen as social: positions in the multi-voiced self are occupied by others (Hermans, 2004). The *I* takes another person as a position that *I* can occupy, which offers an alternative perspective regarding the world and the *Me* (ibid). My experience resonates with the dialogical self in the crucial place of an other in the self. I seem to need an other even when I am not engaging in actual conversations: in my sandplay sessions, my writing, my processing of childhood trauma, and my sand world. However, instead of moving between various *I* positions and engaging in an exchange among these positions, I seem to need an other to allow me to further immerse into the place I am at and be the person I experience myself as at those particular moments. From the perspective of the dialogical self, for me, the other, whether it is an imaginary person, sand, paper, or figures in my sand world, is the 'alter ego', is 'another I' (Hermans, 2004:21). However, instead of speaking from their own perspectives, they usually act as an other that is being there and receiving my perspective. They need to be an other that I feel less obligated to, if not completely free from obligation.

To summarise, on one hand, the needing of an other resonates with the concept of self as dialogical. On the other hand, in my experience, there is a central role of a monologue that is being received yet not actively responded to, which I relate to the obligation to others.

Butler (2005) talks about Foucault's struggle when he was asked to give an account of himself in an interview, *How Much Does it Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth*. The account he gave does not offer causal explanation of why he came to think and act the way he did. Butler emphasises that Foucault's account was given in the interlocutory scene in which Foucault was reacting to the questions and presuppositions of the interlocutor. Then Butler (2005:112) raises that question: 'Is he telling the truth about himself, or is he responding to the demands that his interlocutor

imposes upon him?’ This is a question that I am asking in relation to therapeutic setting. In talking therapy which is also an interlocutory scene, is the client telling stories about themselves, or responding to the demands that the interlocutor – the therapist in this case – imposes upon them? When the therapist asks the client what brings them to therapy, there is a demand imposed upon the client: tell me your story which explains your current action.

Following these questions of truth-telling, Butler (2005) looks at Foucault’s theory of confession. In her reading of Foucault, confession is an act of publishing oneself in words and engaging in self-verbalisation which makes one appear for another. The act of externalising and publicising oneself, Butler (2005:113) goes on to say, ‘assimilates confession to the violence of self-scrutiny and the forcible imposition of a regulatory discourse’. In confession, which is an act of manifesting oneself, the inwardness of the self dissolves and the self is reconstituted in its externality. The violence here for me is what Butler (2005:114) writes later: ‘manifestation does not “express” a self but takes its place, and it accomplishes that substitution through an inversion of the particular self into an outward appearance’. It is not an unfamiliar idea to relate religious confession to psychotherapy (e.g. Richardson & Stewart, 2009; Worthen, 1974). Similarly, in the therapy room, as in confession, through giving a verbal account of themselves, the client makes himself/herself appear not only to but also *for* the therapist, as discussed previously. In spite of the particular privacy offered by therapy, narrating in therapy is an act of externalising and publicising oneself. It may be argued that it is this externalising that serves the client therapeutically. However, I encourage attention to the violence that penetrates the demand of external telling. As ‘a certain performative production [...] within established public conventions’ is required therein and is the aim of confession (Butler, 2005:113), this performative act is also involved in telling one’s story to another within a specific setting, in this case, the therapeutic setting, which comes with its own convention. This again closely relates to Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power. From my perspective, to become this externalised and publicised self, and this performative act entails loss. As Butler’s (2005:114) elaboration of Foucault suggests, it requires one to give oneself over to the ‘publicized mode of appearance’. In other words, one needs to move out of the solitude of oneself to become a self that is situated in the public and social relation.

The loss involved here is the inwardness that is pre-constituted. I see my monological telling as an act of resisting this moving-out of myself.

In my monological telling, I seem to situate my need in the absolute centre. Psychotherapy is relationship-centred. It requires each of the party to move out of themselves and situate themselves in a specific setting which comes with its own norms and conventions. Ironically yet importantly, this moving out and publicising oneself, so is the loss involved, are necessary for the connection between the two, as interpersonal relationship is always situated socially. An account of oneself is always addressed to another and it always takes place in the normative structure (Butler, 2005). Therefore, my verbal and non-verbal monological telling that almost refuses an active response from another seem to be a resistance to the loss of the solitary self. I place the *I* that I am at those moments and the *Me* that this *I* experiences in the absolute centre which cannot be obtained in a narrative that is given to an active other.

The telling involves the need to be known. Regardless of whether it is integrated, fragmented, coherent, or incoherent, I want to be known as who I am at this moment of telling. Thinking about the scarred shell, at the time it appeared, I just needed it to be there without enquiring into the meaning of it. I did not need and could not tell why, how and what about it.

My discussion above raises the question about the constitution of self which is worth elaborating. It is easy to see that I am taking the stance that there is an inward self. However, I am not proposing a notion of self as a complete self-contained isolated entity that is separate from and vulnerable to the social demands.

The resonance among the theory of the dialogical self, Foucault's, and Butler's philosophy is the place of the other in the ontological constitution of the self and one's relation to oneself. The dialogical self sees the self as social with the other inside the self's construction (Hermans et al., 1992). Foucault, according to Butler (2005), sees one's relation to oneself as social and public. Butler (2005) sees the ontological constitution of the self as inherently relational: self emerges in being addressed by and addressing to others within context that is out of one's control or not of one's choice.

As Winnicott's (1975:99) famous quote says, 'there is no such thing as a baby', Butler (2005) stresses the relationality and dependency in the very basic psychological formation of the self. Without this 'you', she claims, 'I' am nothing. My need of the

telling as described previously affirms this central place of addressivity. I seemed to need this 'you' to know myself. According to Butler (ibid), it is from this being relational with others and the dependency that lies at the core of our very formation where the opacity of the self arises. The other is implicated in the formation of the self which generates the foreignness in oneself that cannot be fully narrated. We cannot fully talk about ourselves and give reason to our every action due to the opacity of the formation of self. Drawing on Adorno, Butler (ibid) elaborates that it is in the push and pull of wanting to know, to rationalise, and yet being unable to fully know and remaining in the midst of myth thus also remaining impressionable to others and open to injury that we become human. That is to say it is in the distress of this predicament that we become human. Therefore, to require a coherent narrative at all times is to deny the limit of self-knowing and knowing others, to ignore the relationality and dependency in our very formation, and to disavow the predicament of the human community.

Standing in line with Butler, in my writing above, I am not proposing that I withdraw into myself and reject external or internal two-way dialogue because there is an inward self that I can fully experientially know but cannot tell. Rather, I cannot bypass the epistemic limits concerning myself (Butler, 2005; Hodapp, 2013). I am resisting the obligation to others and the normative frame in my telling; however, this act of resistance is also situated within the obligation and norm from which I can never break free.

Apart from the foreignness in the formation of self, there is also the foreignness of language. From Bakhtinian perspective which I see as resonating with Wittgenstein's idea of language as social and cultural, narrative is generated through the individual's encounters in the social world (Skinner et al., 2001). Language, for Bakhtin (1981:293), 'lies on the borderline between self and the other'. He argues (Bakhtin, 1981:293-294):

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the

word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

The foreignness of words, for me, is the limitation of language and narrative. While Bakhtin thinks that one can convert the foreignness of language into one's own by appropriation, I hold the view that one can perhaps familiarise oneself with the foreignness, but one can never make the foreignness their own. As I discussed previously in relation to Wittgenstein's philosophy, when one speaks, it is an outward journey to the social and cultural, it is to participate in the rules of the language game, which is a process in which what is individual is necessarily suppressed (Arsith, 2011).

Whenever I speak, there exists the intrusion of this outsider that is foreign to me. From here arises the value of not talking, the non-verbal, the touch of the sand, the need not to talk about my sand world, and the need to not give reason or explanation, though there always still exists a need to be known. There is another push and pull here: the need to resist the foreignness and the need to be known which inevitably involves the foreignness.

Piece 3, August 2018

A transcript of one of Winnicott's (cited in Davis & Wallbridge, 1991:35) lectures reads as follows:

. . . in the quiet moments let us say that there is no line but just lots of things they separate out, sky seen through trees, something to do with mother's eyes all going in and out, wandering round. Some lack of need for any integration. That is an extremely valuable thing to be able to retain. Miss something without it. Something to do with being calm, restful, relaxed and feeling one with people and things when no excitement is around.
(Suspension points original)

Here Winnicott describes the infant's return to a 'restful unintegrated state' (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991:35). According to Winnicott, as elaborated by Davis and Wallbridge (1991), the unintegrated state is a state in which there is no 'me' nor 'not-me' for the infant. In other words, no separation from the environment is experienced. It emerges initially in a stage of absolute dependency. The infant is merged with the mother. The unintegrated state experienced in the very beginning of life, to some extent, as Davis and Wallbridge describe (1991), is an extension or a continuation of the state before birth.

In the holding phase of parental care, the infant's ego changes over from the unintegrated state to a structured integration (Winnicott, 1960), or from the primary unintegrated state, integration gradually appears (Winnicott, 1965a). Reliable holding provides ego-support for the infant and allows a sense of trust in the mother and the environment to develop over time (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991). A healthy process in this stage enables the infant to obtain what Winnicott calls 'unit status': the infant is able to become an individual person (Winnicott, 1960:590). It is worth noting that although Winnicott proposes this changeover from the unintegrated state to integration in the holding phase, he does not propose these two states as separate nor propose the changeover as a linear process. Winnicott believes that a return to the unintegrated state

in infant is the precursor of the capacity to relax and enjoy solitude in adult life (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991). In healthy development during holding phase, the continuation of reliable maternal care allows the infant to re-experience the unintegrated state (Winnicott, 1960). And this return to the unintegrated state is not necessarily frightening when there is a sense of security given by the mother, and this return can take place along with reintegration without anxiety (Winnicott, 1965a).

The above quotation from Winnicott describing the infant's return to a 'restful unintegrated state' connects me to a scenario I wrote in my pre-sandplay writing where I was in the therapy room yet felt like I was lying on a bamboo mat in a childhood afternoon. It was a state of asleep yet awake, absorbed into myself yet connected with another and the environment. Winnicott's beautiful writing above speaks to the heart of this experience of mine: sky seen through threes, lack of need for any integration. I see 'sky seen through trees' as a beautiful analogy for some realm of my experience. In there, experience is sky seen through the irregular net of leaves: it might be seen as fragmented as it lacks continuity; however, there is a sense of being whole though it cannot be visually seen. And this is how it should be: there is no need to remove the leaves to see the clear sky, I just rest under the tree and feel the wholeness unseen.

Winnicott (1965a) is certain about that rest for the infant means a return to the unintegrated state, which, as described above, involves merging with the mother and the environment. In my piece of writing about this particular therapy session, I used the word 'immersion' and described talking as pulling me away from this immersion. This speaks a quality of Winnicott's the unintegrated state. Additionally, in later page of this piece of writing, I described my experience in the therapy room as an experience of 'holding' in the therapeutic relationship. Then drawing on Butler (2005), I mentioned the 'indescribable dimension of holding'. Looking at the notion of the unintegrated state, if narrating oneself includes telling oneself to someone else, how could this unintegrated state in which there is no 'me' nor 'not-me' be narrated? If there is no 'me' who tells and there is no 'you' to whom the telling is addressed, there is an impossibility of narration. This seems to be part of where the indescribable dimension of holding lies. Winnicott (1960) believes that during the phase of holding, the dawn of intelligence and the beginning of a mind is initiated. From here, the symbolic functioning emerges (ibid). Thus, language as symbolic system does not yet exist in the holding phase.

If I was experiencing the quality of the unintegrated state where language, logic, and reason do not exist and where neither 'you' nor 'I' are experienced, then it is understandable how having to talk about it brings agony. Also, integration, according to Winnicott (1965a), is linked to more definite emotions, such as excitement and rage. In comparison, the unintegrated state seems to involve less excitement and be subtler; therefore, more difficult to put a definite emotional label on, which also makes it difficult to talk about even when we want to. I see enforced narration of experience like this as separation and impingement, which my following writing will expand on further.

I previously wrote about the inevitable and necessary separation from one's immediate experience when the experience is being narrated. I emphasised how having to talk about my experience pulled me away from my experience. I looked at this from the perspective of the third position. This can also be looked at from the Winnicott's (1960, 1965a) proposal of the three overlapped phases of satisfactory parental care: 1) holding; 2) the mother and the infant living together and 3) the mother, the father and the infant all living together. The holding phase, according to Winnicott (1960, 1965a), is prior to the notion of *living with*. The holding experience in therapy room can be the same. Speaking from this experience of mine, it was an experience of immersion and restfulness. It was close to the feeling of being content alone, though knowing the presence of another. In this stage, having to talk seems to me to be bringing forward the fact of 'living with' – there is another person with his/her own needs, thoughts, and feelings. Once I start to talk, I am no longer by myself or within myself in the presence of another. There is another person whom I address and who responds. I have the full awareness of another and decide my action with consideration of the other. It brings me back to Wittgenstein's language game. When language is in use, there is an inevitability of engagement with the rules of the game which cannot be achieved when we are in full immersion with our individual experience. Therefore, the possibility is that the act of narrating in the experience of holding can draw one out of the very experience itself.

Narrating can also act as an impingement in the holding experience. One of the functions of a holding environment is to minimise impingement to which the infant reacts (Winnicott, 1960). Impingement can be understood as external stimuli here. In the holding environment, which provides security and succeeds in protecting the infant

from physiological insult, 'a continuity of being' is developed (ibid). Alternative to being is reacting which results from impingement, and it brings annihilation to personal being (ibid). As I have discussed previously, there is always foreignness in language which, in my opinion, we can never convert into our own. And narrative is generated from our encounter with the world (Skinner et al., 2001). From this perspective, the foreignness of language can be viewed as an impingement from outside. According to Winnicott (1960), satisfactory maternal care for the infant in early stages includes taking account of the infant's lack of knowledge of anything else but its self. In therapy, if a holding environment and this acknowledgement of lack of knowledge is to be provided, it is possible that in some circumstances, it would mean to protect the client from the impingement of words. Winnicott (1965b) starts his paper about the capacity to be alone by appreciating the silent phases or moments in psychoanalysis, viewing it as an achievement on the part of the client as it can indicate the client's ability to be alone. This again may facilitate the re-experiencing of the unintegrated state which is different from disintegration. Disintegration indicates a loss. It is undoing what has been gained, thus it is painful (Winnicott, 2006). On the contrary, unintegration is regarded by Winnicott as valuable, restful and calm (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991)

The unintegrated state, holding and the capacity to be alone are all closely related. Being able to experience a return to the unintegrated state is a basis for the capacity to be alone which is a significant sign of maturity in emotional development (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991; Winnicott, 1965b). The capacity to be truly alone has its origin in being alone as an infant or a child with the presence of the mother or mother-substitute (Winnicott, 1965b). Winnicott (1965b) calls it being alone in the presence of someone. Being alone here in Winnicott's definition is not being actually physically alone. In my reading of it, it talks about a situation where there is no intrusion or external demand which allows one to be with oneself or where external stimuli is managed by the individual without being felt as violation. Winnicott (1965b) argues that it is only in being alone, the infant's own personal life can be discovered by him. I see this as what psychotherapy should facilitate.

In the immature stage, the infant's weak ego organisation is supported by the reliable presence of the mother, which allows the infant to be alone (Winnicott, 1965b). This relationship between the infant and the ego-supportive mother is termed by

Winnicott (1965b) as 'ego-relatedness'. In this relationship exists two people, one or both of whom is/are alone, however, the presence of each other is important (ibid). Over the course of time, the ego-supportive environment provided by the mother or mother-substitute is internalised in the individual's inner world and the capacity to be alone develops (ibid). However, the presence of someone is always there equating unconsciously with the mother figure: 'the state of being alone is something which [...] always implies that someone else is there' (Winnicott, 1965b:34).

This idea that someone else is always present even when one is alone with introjected ego-supportive environment reminds me of one of the themes that came out from my previous reflective writing: there is always a need for an other who is there without introducing a demand; whether from a person, disciplinary power, or the rule of language game. I need to be alone yet I also need the presence of someone else, which is the essence of my monologue that was addressed to an imaginary other. The therapeutic function of my monologue seems to be providing the 'ego-relatedness' that is crucial in early development. Similarly, being in the sandplay sessions with the silent presence and witness of the therapist and the sand also offered me the experience of being alone with the presence of another.

My second piece of pre-sandplay writing concerns the innate aloneness of life that each of us faces. I see an overemphasis of talking and narration in therapy as a defence against, and denial of this aloneness, which alienates aspects of our experience in life.

This aloneness of life that I wrote about is not the same as Winnicott's capacity to be alone with the presence of another. While for Winnicott, the capacity to be alone comes with contentment with solitude and sense of safety, the aloneness of life that I wrote about can bring horror and despair, which is one of the reasons there can be defence and denial against it. Nonetheless, as Macquarrie (1972) thinks, the experience of feeling profoundly alone, despite the loneliness it brings, can also bring a sense of uniqueness to an individual. Echoing this is Winnicott's opinion, as mentioned above, that it is only in being alone that the infant's unique personal life is discovered by himself. What this brings to the application in psychotherapy is the therapist's capacity to allow the client to be alone and not to intrude the client's process for our own desire to empathically understand.

There is perhaps little doubt that relationship is paramount in psychotherapy. We believe that it is the relationship that heals. We see the value of therapy as two persons meeting each other in emotional depth. It is about understanding and being understood. It is about being together. Montaigne (1927:237-238) writes that '[w]e must reserve a little back-shop, all our own, entirely free, wherein to establish our true liberty and principal retreat and solitude'. As therapist, perhaps we expect our clients to feel safe to open up this 'little back-shop' to us in the therapy room. However, can we accept or stand that the client has this place all to themselves, entirely free, also from us? Can we allow our clients to retreat and have solitude back in the little back-shop of their own without seeing it as the client's defence or resistance? Can we allow the client not to talk, not to tell us their stories?

A client of mine mentioned a 'weird' feeling she had during the week. It was a sense of wanting to be with others but not wanting to be actively engaging in conversation or activities. This feeling was also present during the session. She talked about it with puzzlement. Winnicott's concept of being alone with the presence of an other appeared in my mind. It seemed to me that what the client wanted was to be alone in the presence of someone. Therefore, instead of trying to help her to make sense of it or find the right words to articulate, I simply offered her the opportunity to simply sit in silence with me, to simply not engage with any external activity, including talking. By doing so, I suspended both my and her tendency to explain and to know. I sat there with her without knowing what was going on, why she was feeling that way. The silence lasted for a few minutes, followed by an exploration of something significant.

Different therapists would have different ways to approach this session. My approach then was simply to stop, to be silent. As therapists, we strive so much to understand. Sometimes we omit the possible benefit of allowing the client to be 'alone'. It is perhaps not easy to tolerate the fact that the client has their own process going on that we cannot engage with and cannot know. Just as a parent would need to tolerate at a stage that they would never know as well as they use to be about what is going on in their child's life, otherwise they would become intrusive.

It is worth pointing out that Davis and Wallbridge (1991:35) address in their elaboration of Winnicott's work that the return to the unintegrated state in infancy is the precursor of the adult ability 'to be inconsequential'. What I find valuable in here

is that to be inconsequential – that is to say not to follow logic and relinquish the need for worth and significance – in adulthood is acknowledged as an ability.

Answering the simple question ‘how has your week been’ often troubles me. My mind often goes blank for few seconds then I search for something sounds good enough to tell. When nothing significant and interesting enough – whether it is a holiday trip, something I succeed or fail, something to look forward to or dread about – can be offered, I start to feel lame and insufficient. But it does not do justice to the fresh autumn leaves I see when I cross the meadows, the street lights covered by the mist, the starry nights that often accompany me while I am walking home. When subjected to the question, the demand of a narrative, the act of telling, all these fade away and are lost in the answering. In the act of narrating lays the idea that something is worth telling about, something significant and meaningful enough happen. As Sartwell (2000) points out, narrative devotes itself to what is important, significant and worth remembering. He notes that narrative comes apart in the moment of insignificance (Sartwell, 2000). And it ‘has already come apart everywhere, all the time, wherever people are breathing, or walking around, or watching TV, and not getting anywhere narratively speaking’ (Sartwell, 2000:65). Instead of sweeping our lack of significance into narrative, Sartwell’s (2000:65) recommendation to life, as Freeman (2008) effectively summarises, is *just chill*:

You cannot narrate if you cannot breathe, so shut up for a moment and take a deep breath. Pull yourself away from significance for a moment and let yourself feel the sweet, deep, all-enveloping insignificance all around you. And take comfort in the triviality of your life-project and your failure in realizing it.

Piece 4, September 2018

I started to read Darian Leader's (2009) book *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* initially for professional and personal interests without even slightest research intention. However, when I read Leader's writing into the symbolic impasses of melancholia, connections were made in my head between this research project and melancholia. Reading through my writings, struggle in explanation, loss, and melancholy are reoccurring themes. The ending of my personal therapy had brought me intense pain that I do not understand. Later on, I wrote about the sense of melancholy that often penetrates my emotional life that I have never been able to fully talk about and explain. Therefore, I went back to read my previous writings under the light of Leader's book and Freud's (1917) original writing on mourning and melancholia. This piece of writing can be regarded as my attempt to make sense of my life and sandplay experience through these theories on melancholia in relation to the impossibility of language and giving a narrative account.

I am writing this piece in relation to melancholia not with the intention to explain why I did not know how to speak about some of my experiences. I am in no way making a 'diagnosis' of myself. Instead, it is an attempt to convey the sense of expressive impossibility with the help of theory related to melancholia. It is another attempt of mine to look at the failure of language and narrative from a theoretical angle with which my experience resonates.

I will start with Freud's (1917) discussion on mourning and melancholia with critiques on his pathologising of melancholia. After an experimental application of Freud's theory on my own experience, I will move on to Leader's (2009) discussion which I find more satisfying.

For Freud (1917), there are three preconditions for melancholia: the loss of a loved object, ambivalence between love and hatred, and identification with the lost object which leads to self-reproach.

Early in his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917) points out a main difference between mourning and melancholia which is related to the explanation of feeling and behaviour. Freud points out that although mourning and melancholia can bring the same intensity of pain, same level of loss of interest, and inhibition of any

kind of performance, the only reason why mourning, unlike melancholia, does not strike people as pathological is that it can be easily explained. Freud argues that compared to mourning, in the case of melancholia, the loss is more notional in nature. Mourning can occur for not only the death of a loved one but also for a loss in an abstract form, for example, for freedom, or an ideal. However, what is lost is easily identified. In the case of melancholia, the loss may well be a real or concrete loss of a loved one through events such as death. Alternatively, it can be the loss of the loved one as a love-object, for instance, being abandoned. However, in some cases, Freud says, it is difficult to see what has been lost. In other words, the melancholic is not conscious of what has been lost. In some other cases, what or who is lost is clear, but the melancholic is not aware of what it is about that person or that thing s/he has lost. Therefore, Freud relates melancholia to the loss of an object which is withdrawn from consciousness, whereas in mourning, 'no aspect of the loss is unconscious' (Freud, 1917:205). This, for me, indicates how melancholia can be hard to talk about as it is situated in the unknown, the unexplainable.

My problem with Freud's pathologising melancholia lies on my critique in the inquiry of casual agency and responsibility on us when we are asked to give an account of ourselves illustrated in my first piece of pre-sandplay writing. Continuing to see melancholia as pathology because of its lack of clear reason as opposed to mourning which can be easily explained as Freud suggests is to reinforce the act of giving an account of oneself. When a clear explanation is lacking, we are guilty of being abnormal. However, I wonder, does not each of us have the experience of losing something or someone without being aware of it, or being aware of a loss yet never fully apprehend what that loss really entails?

Freud (1917) writes about melancholia in relation to mourning. Both of them are related to the reaction to a lost beloved object. However, Freud (1917:203) conceives melancholia as pathology in relation to unresolved grief in which the lost object cannot be let go. However, there are challenges to this view of seeing melancholia as pathological especially in the social and political context of disavowed losses (Farley, 2018). In the context of colonialism, there is the haunting presence of 'the felt loss of a treasured past' that has been comprehensively destroyed thus even mourning it is impossible (Frosh, 2013:8). Eng and Han (2000) depathologise

melancholia as everyday group experience for Asian Americans regarding the experience related to immigration, assimilation and racialisation. Apart from arguments from social and political angles, melancholia is also argued to be a more general and basic emotional state that can be experienced by everyone. Elaborating on Kristeva's work, Stillwaggon (2017) explains that the individualisation of the child as they are introduced to language is experienced as a loss by both the mother and the child. It is a loss of the previous identity in the stage where the child's survival is completely dependent on the mother's active presence. There is no return to this identity through language and it brings an unspeakable grief. Referring to Freud's later work, Eng and Kazanjian (2003:4) recognise melancholia as necessary and a precondition for mourning, as ego is composed of 'the residues of its accumulated losses'. What is proposed by these arguments is the depathologising of melancholia. This is the stance I take. I see melancholic attachment to loss as a potential universally shared experience in human life.

Returning to Freud's discussion on mourning and melancholia, he observes that a significant difference between mourning and melancholia is the self-reproach that is involved in melancholia, which is described by his famous statement 'in mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so' (Freud, 1917:206). Freud explains self-reproach in melancholia through the theory of identification and ambivalence in the relationship. In mourning, in spite of the resistance and the great deal of time it might require, the libido previously invested in the lost object is eventually being adjusted and investment in substitutes becomes possible. Thus after successful mourning, the ego can be left free and uninhibited again. In comparison, in melancholia, the letting go of the object becomes impossible. In order to perpetuate the lost object and the love for the lost object, melancholic identifies with the object. The object is incorporated into the ego (Quinodoz, 2009). In other words, 'loving' the object becomes 'being' the object (ibid). In this way, the loved object is never lost nor needing to be given up. According to Freud, this identification which takes the form of narcissistic regression also brings to the fore the ambivalence between love and hatred. As a part of the ego that is identified with the ego is developed, the hatred that is directed to the external object is then directed to oneself. Therefore the self-reproach of the melancholic is actually an

unconscious attack on the lost loved object.

As I read Freud (1917), I enter a playful and experimental place of interaction between his theory of melancholia and my own life experiences. In the light of Freud's theory, I can see my one-year separation from my parents when I was seven as indeed catastrophic to not only my external but also my internal connection to them as loved objects, which speaks the meaning of object loss (Roth, 2009). The abortion in my family due to China's one-child policy stripped away my chance to be an elder sister along with the loss of the possibility of a different life. The childhood trauma I experienced altered my sense of self, which can also be a loss of the ideal self and ideal world. To sustain the attachment to what was lost in reality and what could have been lost internally, the process of narcissistic identification with the lost object might have happened and the hatred that turned back to myself might contribute to the sadness I feel in life. While these possible explanations and (of course over-simplified) analysis make sense rationally and theoretically, they do not feel satisfying enough. What touches me and brings relief is the impossibility of symbolisation in melancholia as argued by Leader (2009).

A choice of identification with the dead or the lost object for the melancholic, according to Leader (2009), is to die with them, physically or psychically. This situates the melancholic in a particular position of in-between two worlds: the world of the dead and the living. It is a state of utter solitude (Leader, 2009). It becomes a torment to find words that can describe this dual existence, this impossible experience of being in two places at the same time.

I have realised through writing, including those in this thesis and those that are not, a sense of loneliness and separation from others in my life. I experience this place as somewhere no one can enter. It also feels impossible to effectively invite others to enter. When I read my reflection on my second sandplay session, where I built '*the world beyond reach*' after I encountered Leader's writing on melancholia, I found myself seeing the quality of 'in-between' in my experience of this sand world.

It is a world where I '*want to go but do not belong*'. It is the home where the lost ideal parent I long for, the lost could-have-been sibling, and the lost ideal baby-me live. '*I am deeply attached to this world, though I know I don't belong. I know that I can't go there, otherwise I'd not want to come back.*' Creating this world allowed me

to concretely access this status of 'in-between'. This world beyond reach is full of beauty as well as losses. Perhaps its beauty lies in the fact that it contains what I have lost and can no longer obtain. Being with this world in the sandplay session was being in the gulf between social reality and the utter solitude Leader mentions (2009). The phrase '*I'd not want to come back*' easily delivers a message about death. Being with this sand world is touching both the world of the living and the dead at the same time.

From the very start of my series of writing, I presented 'explanation' as a struggle for me. In the second piece of pre-sandplay writing, I wrote about the 'expressive impossibility', the 'neither this or that' (cited in Abbott, 2013:27). Thinking about the loneliness and melancholy I have always felt, I realised then, '*it is about do not know how to tell*'. And this do not know how to tell brings me difficulty in therapy.

Leader (2009) acknowledges that a part of melancholia's difficulty is to do with finding the way to express the impossibility. Wanting to express is itself a part of the problem. As impossible as the expression feels, there is also a necessity to convey the impossibility. I find that this impossibility and the necessity to convey summarise an important theme that comes out from my reflective writings. I started this research project with a sense of frustration and resistance to, as well as rebellion against narrative and narrative coherence. However, as this research project proceeds, I also recognise the need to tell, to either an actual or an imagined other.

Following my writing on the world beyond reach, I recognised '*the paradoxical feelings of wanting to tell about myself and be known on one hand, and wanting to refrain from this telling and explaining due to frustration of the doomed effort of telling*'. Then in the doomed effort of telling, I am confronted with the utter solitude.

Leader (2009) explains the melancholic's struggle with language based on Freud's (1917) argument. According to Freud's theory, there are two psychical systems involved in thinking. One is linked to perception of things which he calls thing representation and the other is linked to words and speech which he terms word representation. Thing representation, which consists of collection of memory traces of things, and word representation, which is constituted by acoustic and semantic aspects of language, are usually linked together. Mourning is made possible through the

moving between thing representation and word representation. Through the pathway of preconscious, the unconscious ambivalent battle between love and hate towards the lost object is made conscious. In the case of melancholia, this pathway is blocked. Unconscious thing representation cannot be reached through conscious word representation. Therefore, as Leader (2009:189) concludes, ‘at the heart of melancholia is a problem to do with language. Words and things seem radically separated for the melancholic’. A symbolic impasse is then present for melancholic (Leader, 2009).

Leader (2009) identifies parts of the melancholic’s self-reproach and self-denigration as contributed by the failure to speak properly and articulately about the lost object and their relation to it. Since for melancholic, words fail to touch their referent, ‘making them do so may involve violence’ (Leader, 2009:192). Though not exactly the same, this can also be linked back to Butler’s (2005) argument on the violence involved in asking one to give an account of oneself while the formation of self involves inevitable enigma.

Again, it brings me back to the shame I feel about not being articulate enough. I experienced this shame as a client and also see this shame from my client in my practice. A requirement for articulation, I would argue that even the help to articulate something that is impossible to express, can intensify this shame and self-reproach which can be already strong. As Leader (2009:190) recognises, there is an ‘abyss separating language and its referents’ for melancholic. Then he asks a question based on the struggle that melancholic faces (Leader, 2009:190-191):

If melancholia means that the passage from things to words is blocked, would the aim be to reverse this? Or, taking the idea of impossibility seriously, to try less to access so-called thing representations than to allow the person to find words to index the impossibility of the passage from thing to word representations, from one representational system to the other: *to find words to say how words fail*. (Italics original)

‘To find words to say how words fail’. Isn’t it exactly what I have been doing

in this research project? When words fail and when coherence cannot be obtained or need not to be obtained, in the times of impossibility, the therapeutic task is not to help the client to gain words that is good enough to symbolise experience, but to allow the failure, the incoherence, the impossibility or simply the lack of need for coherence or narration. Leader (2009) sees finding words to say how words fail as one of the functions of poetry. I do agree. At the same time, my sandplay also gives me an expression for the impossibility. The space for not talking when I engage with the expressive impossibility and the world in-between is one of the main therapeutic function of sandplay for me. Perhaps what is important for me in my sandplay is not that it enables me to express but it is that it offers me a space to not express (in order to be understood) and still be with the impossibility?

Earlier, I raised the question whether each of us has the experience of losing something or someone without being aware of it or being aware of a loss yet never fully apprehending what that loss actually entails. What I am proposing through this is that melancholia does not necessarily refer to clinical depression as we would call it today. I propose that elements of melancholia are something that we may all feel at times in our lives. Therefore, the symbolic impasses, the expressive impossibility are what we might all possibly experience. I would go so far as to argue that the inevitability of death confronts us with the loss of an ideal life. When we became aware of death, the finitude of life, something catastrophic happens to our relation to ourselves and the world.

I think of an experience I had related to this 'in-between two worlds'. I was on the second deck of a bus, and I had just finished my work with a bereaved client earlier. I was three chapters into a touching book about loss and death. At a certain point, I started to burst into tears. I wiped my eyes and they were soon filled with tears again. I looked out of the window, watching everything that were passing by outside of the bus window. Sitting at the front of the top deck of the bus gave me a distant yet clear view of the outside world. It was late afternoon in a crisp spring day. It was still bright everywhere. I watched people entering the playhouse, bars and cafés, cars meeting at the junction of the roads. Through the glass window of an Italian eatery, I saw people enjoying their meals alone or with companions. I saw people at the bus stops checking the noticeboard waiting for the right bus to come. Everyone lives, everything is alive,

the walking, talking, eating people, the moving cars, the trees, the breeze, the sun. Yet I sat on the bus, through these aliveness, death pounded my heart, harder than ever. I started to realise my tears were coming from a place of grief. I was grieving for life, for the inevitability of loss to death. At the same time, through death, I saw life again. While hit by the inevitable loss and pain, I saw the beauty and preciousness of life.

This brings me back to the existential topic I touched on previously. I believe this experience does not only come from a personal place but also a shared place. It comes from a loss and grief that we all encounter whether we decide to look right at it or shy away from it. It is part of what brings my melancholy. It is situating in-between, a never-ending grief for life, a sustained mourning. If melancholia is a sustained mourning (Freud, 1917) , then far from pathology, a melancholic attachment to this destined loss is one that none of us can avoid, therefore, so is the impossibility of narration.

Afterthoughts

Initially I ended this piece of writing about loss, grief, melancholia and death with a note 'I don't know how to end this piece yet'. None of my previous writings are finished with a neat, conclusive ending. However, how to end this piece bothers me particularly. Few months later, I still do not know how to bring this piece to a closure. Interestingly enough, the very struggle of melancholic is concerned with closure (Freud, 1917) . Melancholia is mourning without an end, a refusal to detach from the loved lost object (ibid). Perhaps it is not merely a coincidence that I ended my series of writing with a piece on loss and melancholia. The closer I approach to the end of this research project, the more resistant I am to draw it to an end. The fantasy is that by the end of a doctorate project, I should be able to find out something definite and draw a presentable conclusion. However, it feels nothing more than a start. In the resistance to end this piece and draw the whole thesis to a neat conclusive closure lays a parallel to my challenge to narrative coherence as unity, harmony, closure and linearity (Freeman, 2010) which is often regarded as desirable.

Given what have been said, it is perhaps not difficult to imagine my struggle in writing a conclusion to this thesis. I sensed the significance of loss and melancholia in this whole thesis as I read through after I produced my first draft, and I could not make

sense of it. There needed to be a place for it in the conclusion chapter but I did not know how and where it should be. This struggle entangles with my struggle to end this particular piece of writing. As the refusal to closure not only belongs to this piece of writing, but also carries a significance for the whole thesis, my resolution to this struggle is to carry it into the next chapter, the conclusion chapter. As Eng and Kazanjian (2003) argues, the productive and creative potential of melancholia, unlike in mourning where the devotion to the lost object is relinquished and can be replaced, lies in its continuous engagement with the loss and its remains. The act of continuation from this chapter to the next perhaps is a continuous engagement with the unarticulatable loss.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Returning to Elegy

I am still having problems producing a satisfactory conclusion. I particularly struggle with writing down the sense of loss and melancholia to which I need to give a place in this conclusion. There is a visceral urge to have it written here, but it feels impossible. I cannot make more sense of it, and I know there is more than what I have known. I have written writing as elegy in chapter 3 and devoted a whole chapter to loss and melancholia, however it does not feel enough. There is more needing be said, and yet I am not able to say it. I feel trapped in limbo.

Maybe the whole thesis is an elegy? It is locked into the order of sign, displaying my entrapment in language, and it somehow confirms what it critiques (Sartwell, 2000). Words and narratives are all I have here after all. The more I write, the more I sense what cannot be written. Throughout this thesis is the presence of the absence, that is the 'unspeakable absence' of loss as an 'ineffable presence' (Stillwaggon, 2017:60). Perhaps the whole thesis holds a melancholic attachment to the unspeakable that is lost in my writing. I think of my methodological decision on writing and presenting my thesis as variations on a theme, returning to it from different places and angles. I wonder whether it is an unconscious melancholic returning to the lost object again and again, refusing to 'move on'. At the same time, it is exactly this refusal that holds the creative power (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003) that makes this thesis possible.

I do not know how to write what I cannot write but it needs to be written, so I am writing about this impossibility to write, exercising what Leader (2009) suggests. Perhaps more will come to me as time passes. And this is the uncertainty and unpredictability that I have devoted myself to in my methodological approach. For now, I shall move on to other parts of this conclusion.

Reviewing my writings, I realised the value of the multiple perspectives I was taking in my writing. I speak from the positions as a therapist, as a researcher, and as a client in both talking therapy and sandplay sessions. I also speak from my talking-self, non-verbal self, child-self and adult-self, the part that longs to talk and the part that refuses to talk, the part that finds comfort in narrative and the part that is frustrated by it, the part that engages with theories and the part that finds them inadequate in speaking of experience. This multiplicity of positions and perspectives within this thesis offers unique insight into the topic about narrative in/coherence in counselling and psychotherapy.

In spite of some resistance to offer conclusion and closure, I would like to conclude my thesis with two main messages: letting go and holding on. As will be made clear in my writing later, these are also my suggestions to the application of my ideas to counselling and psychotherapy.

Letting Go

Referring back to Strawson's (2004a, 2004b, 2010) critique of the Psychological Narrative thesis which claims that human-beings conceive and live our lives as narratives or stories, and the Ethical Narrative thesis which believes that a richly narrative outlook of life is essential to a good life, my thesis urges the letting go of these two claims. Like Strawson (ibid), I believe that there are other ways of experiencing that do not necessarily take a narrative form and there are good ways to live which are deeply non-narrative.

My writing and reflection on my sandplay experience, my personal therapy and other life experience confront these two theses with the limitations of telling stories about ourselves and offering an account of ourselves.

What is repeatedly emphasised about coherent narrative is its function in providing life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning (e.g. Adler, 2012; McAdams & McLean, 2013). It is undeniable that succeeding in giving a coherent narrative account of oneself brings a degree of satisfaction. Yet, the obsession with meaning and purpose, shown through the constant searching for a coherent narrative, leads to the fallacy of mastery. It denies the unknowingness of self and other, the non-

narrativisable self, assuming a greater agency and explainability than we can hold (Butler, 2005). Counselling and psychotherapy often hold a contradiction. We emphasise the ability to tolerate the unknown, yet with a hope that some sense can somehow be made eventually, whether it is through the therapist's interpretation or the client's own realisation. For example, while recognising that the unconscious is often not available to symbolisation and is part of each person's psychical life, psychoanalysis often strives to bring the unknown into known; and the falling apart of a coherence narrative is recognised as a sign of pathology (e.g. Freud, 1953). Isn't this itself, to some extent, saying that we cannot satisfactorily live with the unconscious and the unknown? When confronted with the black hole, my melancholy and pain, I am convinced of what exists beyond narrative coherence, narrative, and narrativity. As Sartwell (2000:65) writes, '[n]arrative comes apart at the extremes; [...] it comes apart in ecstasy, in writhing pain, at death'. To insist on a coherent narrative at all times is to shy away from the fact that life sometimes is horrible, chaotic, and absurd (Frank, 2013), and that a lot of times we are left alone to face what life brings to us. It serves to alienate and exclude the part of experience that is beyond coherent narrative characterised by order, logic, linearity, and causality. As Sartwell (2000) points out, if one sees one's life as narratable and intelligible, then in the course of narration one has to elide the parts of one's life that are incompatible with this view. To insist on a constant coherent narrative excludes people who do not experience their life as coherent narrative structure, including the Episodics as Strawson (2004a, 2004b, 2010) proposes, and people who for some reason cannot narrate linearly, whose speech is unintelligible, e.g. people with dementia (e.g. Freeman, 2008) or who have a brain injury (e.g. Brockmeier & Medved, 2010). To insist that human-beings are narrative in nature, that human experience is constructed by narrative, that coherent narrative is essential for a good life, is to brutally strip humanity from people who are different. It was this emphasis on the psychological Narrative and the ethical Narrative theses that had brought me shame and doubt about myself. I now realise that doing this research project somehow has served me as salvation. Being open to parts of me that are not so together, nor coherent, and relating to people with similar experience through engagement with literature have released me from seeing my incoherence as a shame

and inadequacy. Reading Goronwy Rees's (cited in Strawson, 2004a:438) bewilderment of being different and excitement of finding companion, I see myself:

For as long as I can remember it has always surprised and slightly bewildered me that other people should take it so much for granted that they each possess what is usually called 'a character': that is to say, a personality [or personality-possessing self] with its own continuous history ... I have never been able to find anything of that sort in myself ... How much I admire those writers who are actually able to record the growth of what they call their personality, describe the conditions which determined its birth, lovingly trace the curve of its development. ... For myself it would be quite impossible to tell such a story, because at no time in my life have I had that enviable sensation of constituting a continuous personality ... As a child this did not worry me, and if indeed I had known at that time of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man without Qualities*, a novel by Robert Musil], the man without qualities, I would have greeted him as my blood brother and rejoiced because I was not alone in the world; as it was, I was content with a private fantasy of my own in which I figured as Mr. Nobody. (Italic, suspension points, and brackets original).

When I was asked to give a coherent account of my professional and personal development at the end of my training course and was to talk about what I found inexpressible in my personal therapy, I thought there must be something wrong with me. Now, I am relieved that I can see myself without pathologising, and that there are other ways of living and experiencing life.

As I wrote in the introduction of this thesis, I had the thought of myself being someone without stories to tell. This runs a risk of dichotomy, as if it is saying that

some people have stories to tell, and some do not. What is ironic is that in my telling about myself feeling without stories to tell, I was actually telling a story about myself. Through the process of doing this research, this thought about myself as someone with no story to tell coupled with shame it had brought faded away. It is not that some people have stories to tell and some other do not or cannot tell stories. It is that sometimes we can tell stories about some experiences and sometimes some experiences cannot be told as stories; sometimes we desire to tell our stories and sometimes we just simply do not wish to, just as sometimes I feel telling itself betrays some of my lived experiences. When we cannot or do not wish to tell a coherent story, it does not necessarily mean deficiency. Perhaps, some people simply have more of these ‘cannot’ and ‘do not wish to’ moments than others. In these moments, how about letting it be without demands, just as the sand does. ‘It is fine’ – perhaps this simple sentence is what I want to tell myself and others including those who have similar experience and who work with people have similar experience in therapy.

Letting go of the requirement for a meaningful coherent narrative allows me to ‘chill’ (Freeman, 2008), to appreciate the unintegrated state (Winnicott, 1960; Winnicott, 1965a) we might sometimes return to, and to see being inconsequential in adulthood as an ability (Davis & Wallbridge, 1991) rather than an inadequacy. As Sartwell (2000:66) says, we live in an age of anxiety:

For while the disciplinary matrix inscribes us, it also makes us anxious: anxious to please it, anxious to allow ourselves to be inscribed, anxious that our inscriptions have not been recently-enough updated, anxious that some present moment is not being turned to account, anxious that we are failing in our rationality, anxious that we are not perfect instruments, anxious that we are not the perfect masters of instruments, anxious of finding ourselves out, anxious of incoherence, anxious about the future of projects, anxious about living in the present, anxious about the sacred.

We live under a gaze and we turn an internal gaze (Foucault, 1967) on ourselves. We must perform in a certain way to be a sane person, a good client, or a good therapist. We long be significant, to tell stories, to tell stories that are worth telling, and to be coherent. We are anxious when we cannot be. To recognise the unintegrated state in therapy and let go of the demand for stories and narratives in these moments are to let go of the anxiety of goals, making sense and to be significant. These moments of doing nothing, even feeling nothing or nothing significant are especially precious in this modern time we live. Instead of turning insignificance into significance by narrating, it is a precious thing to do to *just chill* (Freeman, 2008) and to occasionally be inconsequential in therapy too. As if we just rest under the tree, looking at the sky through the leaves, which we, as adults in modern time, often forget to do.

My thesis urges readers to pay attention to what might be behind the obsession with coherent narrative. A coherent narrative does not merely serve for the client. The client talks for themselves and *for the therapist*. We talk with a sense of obligation and are anxious when it is not sufficiently met. My thesis also raises the possibility that the emphasis on narrative coherence partially derives from the fact that a story that meets the assumption of narrative structure is intuitively satisfying for the audience (Baerger & McAdams, 1999) and from the audience's – the therapist in the case of counselling and psychotherapy – discomfort with what does not meet the canonical model of story, which again goes back to narrative coherence as alienation and exclusion.

My first message to counsellors and therapists here is to let go. Letting go of the emphasis on and even obsession with coherent narrative is to see the possibility of a different way of living a good life that is not within the narrative framework and to acknowledge the unknowingness of the unconscious and the human psyche. By 'knowing' too well what a 'healthy' coherent story is supposed to be and rendering what does not suit the coherent model as pathological, we risk the danger of being a mother who 'knows too well', which does not leave space for the infant to create a unique response from the mother with their own unique performance or behaviour (Winnicott, 1960). Just like I am able to chill, relinquishing the obsession with and emphasis on coherent narrative perhaps may allow our clients to chill too instead of inducing anxiety and shame.

Holding On

What I seek in speech is the response of the Other...There is no speech without a reply, even if it is only met with silence.

(Lacan, 1995, cited in Kokanovic & Stone, 2018:21)

My thesis is not against narrative. On the contrary, I realise through the process of doing this research project how much I need to tell and be received, even if a lot of the time the reception and response I need were silence. I remember how much I wanted to tell my story to the sandplay therapist when I knew that there was a story that could be told in one of my sand worlds. I needed to hold on to this speech that is given to an other.

It has become obvious in my writing that I desire to tell and I want to be known. It was the impossibility of expression and the necessity to tell and be known that bring me difficulties. I often feel stuck in this liminal space. This corresponds to some people's experience of trauma and catastrophe. For example, in his diary about the life in the Warsaw Ghetto, '*Cups of Tears*', Abraham Lewin (cited in Andrews, 2010) talks about both the impossibility and the necessity of expressing his thoughts and feelings. In the case of melancholia, Leader (2009) recognises the necessity to speak about loss creatively in the form of language that suits each individual and to have a listener to address – a listener who can receive the communication of the impossibility. The emphasis on coherent narrative, from others or/and myself, had trapped me in a limbo. In my wordless touch with sand, my silent encounter with the sand worlds, my messy writing process, my repetitive imaginary telling about my childhood trauma, I freed myself from the external and internalised, explicit and implicit requirement and obligation to make sense, and to be consequential. It was important for me that the silent presence of the sand, the figures in the sand worlds, the pen and paper, and the imaginary other did not expect nor even wait. This has allowed me to express, connect to, and immerse in myself, in my own way and pace, in the presence of an other who is free of their own even slightest agenda, demand, expectation and so forth. A main difficulty I have with narrating to another is indeed the pulling away from myself,

however subtle it is. It comes with the nature of narrative itself, as Sartwell (2000:66) writes:

When I take up more and more of my past life into narrative, I find there a distance. This effort reflects a need to put things in order, and then I lose a succession of present moments; that is, I lose precisely what I am also trying to hold onto the narrative.

This distance was made clear in my experience of the unintegrated state and holding in my personal therapy, and my effort in describing the black hole. As soon as I started to narrate, to tell, something that was present in that experience was lost. Narrative fails to allow everything to live within it. What is ironic is that the need for narrative and language in order to communicate itself is a proof that we can never fully be with each other and that we are always to a certain extent left alone in some experiences of ours. Nonetheless, there is always the longing to tell and to be known by an other, despite the doomed to failure effort of being fully known. Yes, there are other forms of expressive therapeutic means, but even in sandplay therapy, when I wanted to connect to the therapist, it did feel like words were all I have left. Edkins (2003, cited in Andrews, 2010:155) articulates this well for me: '[I]t is both impossible to speak, and impossible not to speak'. As what is argued about traumatic testimony, in communicating my experience to the therapist, the narrative form it takes lends to it a framework – coherence, structure, meaning, comprehensibility – which it lacks (Andrews, 2010). Nonetheless, in spite of the inadequacy, it is important that I do say it (ibid). The significance is simply that something is said (ibid). What, however, is lacking is the acknowledgment of the inevitable failure of words and narrative form. It is perhaps seldom acknowledged by therapists to their clients, that I strive to be with you but I cannot exactly be there with you. And sometimes, my presence itself that requires a coherent narrative, can even act as an intrusion, taking you away from your immersion with the present moment. Winnicott's concept of being alone in the presence of an other is particularly helpful here. It speaks about the capacity of the therapist to tolerate the fact that they do not know what is going on in the client's inner

world but still being able to be present with the client without intrusion, the capacity to allow the client to be alone.

What is most significant, in my opinion, is that despite the inevitable failure of narrative, of language, and of being completely understanding, as therapists, we still try. We make an effort regardless. The message this conveys is a simple but a crucial one: I care.

I remember that when the sandplay therapist could not rescue me in the session where I was in panic about the scarred shell, what mattered to me was simply that she made an effort and she remembered. Thinking again about my client who felt much better by the end of therapy but did not know why, what stayed with me was that I really cared and I repeatedly showed and told him this. To hold onto the striving to narrate, to hear narratives, coherent or not, is to show one cares.

There is something to learn from the sand: to receive without demand (though not completely possible) and to be silent. Returning to Wittgenstein (1922, 1972), if language is a tool that we use in order to communicate, when it fails, one can only be silent: ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ (Wittgenstein, 1922:90).

Yet, we do not need to abandon narrative all together. There is another thing to learn from the sand: we can be together in the silence, together in our aloneness; and to listen to the unsayable, unnarratable and let them be.

To Play

I started this research project with ambivalence and it will not end with certainty.

‘Words have magical power’, as Freedman (2017:69) says, they can bring ‘the greatest happiness or the deepest despair’. Language can be ‘a force for good, for healing, for containment; a reassuring connection with a trusted other; a forgiving and loving experience’, thus holds a curative power, as in confession, prayer (ibid), and, as we would like to believe, in psychotherapy. However, they can also be used as ‘a malignant and toxic weapon’ and it can dominate and silence others’, as in curse and

dissemination of deceptive, harmful information (ibid). This too applies to narrative. As made clear in previous sections of this conclusion, while there is healing power, a need and necessity to tell our stories to a caring other, the obsession and demand on narrative coherence without caution silence and alienate. The need for meaning, through the creation of coherent narrative, brings pressure and anxiety (Sartwell, 2000). Sartwell (2000) finds relief of this pressure and anxiety in caring for his children and playing music when he does not have a goal, a project to finish, manage, or master, or when he immerses himself in the insignificant. He then says that he wishes to play more. Giving the message of letting go and holding on as conclusion and application of my discussion to psychotherapy might seem to create a limbo and a trap-in-between. However, what I want to put forward here is the value of playfulness.

I propose that we can be playful with the concept of coherence and incoherence. In a case study presented by Brockemeier (2004), the co-construction of a story between a 6-year-old boy and an adult interviewer is shown. The boy told a story about a letter in his own way without explaining the temporal order and causality between events. These elements are developed by the questions from the adult. This vividly shows that when children learn to establish culturally and socially recognised coherent narrative, they have to temporally and causally organise a narrative into a sequence that is culturally and socially meaningful (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). However, instead of ‘incoherence’, why don’t we open the possibility to see what does not fit so well into the culturally and socially recognised form as returning to or re-entering the playful place where we tell our stories in our own ways like the 6-year-old boy? It might be a form of individuality that is otherwise lost in the focus on culturally and socially accepted and assumed concept of coherence. Leader (2009) criticises that the well-intended act to teach schoolchildren emotional literacy to articulate their and others’ feelings is sadly tantamount to brainwashing, as it imposes on the individual a shared language and coerces them to use it in place of their own unique ways of expressing themselves. To depathologise what we call incoherence, to allow space for less recognised forms of telling and silence, to blur the boundary between coherence and incoherence are to give space back to this individuality.

Leader’s (2009) solution to the pre-set language forced on children is art and creativity. This is well recognised in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, which

is the source of the emergence of different creative therapy approaches including play therapy, art therapy, dance movement therapy and so forth. However, why don't we play in talking therapy too? What I mean by play here is not the physical act of playing, but the attitude of entering a playful place with the client, with care and without demand. Just like the sand, to witness a construction of a story or a world, to accept and be with the unspeakable, to respond to the most delicate touch and survive the most violent blow (Aite, 2007).

Perhaps sometimes being in therapy with the client is like seeing the sky through trees together. We can see different bits of the sky through the net of leaves as it changes its shape according to seasons and weather, or as it moves with the wind. There are also parts that we cannot see nor describe although they are up there. Sometimes, the client might want to point some part of the sky to us and share with us what shapes they see. In these times, we are there to listen and receive. At other times, the client might want to rest under the tree looking at the sky without saying anything. In these moments, we sit beside them and let them be.

Epilogue: Letting Go and Holding on to the Work

[...] the work is finished, but it is not done.

(Romanyshyn, 2013:345)

It is a week before submission and I am still here struggling. It has been three months since my first attempt to produce an epilogue. And yet, my every attempt to use words is ‘a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure’ (Eliot, 1944:21). Every attempt is a revisit to the acknowledgement that I do not have full control of this work. It renders me vulnerable, yet it is also this place that holds the mystery of this work alive and from which the meaning of this work arises (Romanyshyn, 2013). Every word of certainty fails the work of mystery. So I am returning to sandplay where this work started.

This time, there is only silent and intimate interaction between my hands and my silent listener – sand, as if together, we reject any presentation to the outside world. Perhaps we are reserving this ‘little back-shop’ that is ‘all our own, entirely free’ (Montaigne, 1927:237-238), speaking a language that no one else can understand and perhaps that does not need to be understood. So I shall keep silent here also, and let the sand and my hands speak (or not) the presence of the absence.



Figure 10 Last Sandplay

Now, the work is finished, but it is not or perhaps will never be done.

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Appendix

Information Sheet for Sandplay Facilitator

Back ground and research focus

This research project is for completion of my Professional Doctorate Degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. This research project seeks to explore the concept of narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy through my engagement with and reflection on sandplay experience.

Research methodology and method

The methodologies I adopt for this research project are heuristic inquiry which believes phenomena being researched is understood within the researcher, and writing as inquiry which regards writing as a process of discovery and both the data collection and analysis process.

In order to gain understanding of the research topic, I will engage in a process of short-term sandplay as the ‘player’. At the same time, I will reflect on my sandplay experience. This process of making sense of my sandplay experience will be the focus of analysis in this research project.

Invitation for participation

You are invited to engage in the sandplay process as a facilitator for my sandplay experience and process. This will be a short-term sandplay process – about 6 sessions but negotiable between us. Although this is not usual therapy because of its research purpose, you will be invited to work as the way you do in your normal practice and work within the ethical framework in which you practice. As my analysis will focus on my own process of making meaning, you are not invited as a research participant but only a facilitator.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to anonymise identifiable information of you. My writing will be entirely focusing on my own process. If interaction between us in the

sessions needs to be mentioned in the thesis, no identifiable information about you will be revealed. I will also take photo of the sandworld I make in each sandplay session, but I will not take any photos of you nor your room.

The commitment

This will be a short term period of sandplay therapy. The number of sessions and frequency can be negotiated between us.

As the facilitator, you will be responsible for keeping boundaries including the time boundary and providing the sandplay material.

You will be required to work ethically within the ethical framework in which you practice.

Benefits and risks

You will be paid for your normal hourly rate.

There is no anticipated risk for you in this research project.

Further information

If you have any questions about the research project at any time, please don't hesitate to contact me through s1312015@sms.ed.ac.uk.

If you would like to contact an independent person to discuss this project with, my supervisor Seamus Prior can be contacted through seamus.prior@ed.ac.uk

If you have any complaint regarding the research project, you can contact Charlotte Clarke, the Head of School of Health in Social Science through Charlotte.Clarke@ed.ac.uk and 0131 650 4327.

Ying Liu

Professional Doctorate in Counselling and Psychotherapy

School of Health in Social Science

The University of Edinburgh

Agreement of Participation

I _____ agree to participate in this research project. I have had the purpose and the nature of the research project explained to me. I understand that

- The sandplay sessions are initiated for a research purpose;
- I will be participating this study as a sandplay facilitator not a research participant;
- Any identifiable information of me will be anonymised, if any of it need to be included in the thesis;
- I will be paid at the hourly rate of _____ for _____ sessions over the period of _____;
- I am required to work ethically within _____ ethical framework;
- I have the right to ask questions about the research at any time and I have been given contact details of the responsible person in the case of complaint.

Signature of the sandplay facilitator

Date

Signature of the researcher

Date